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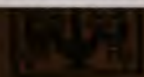
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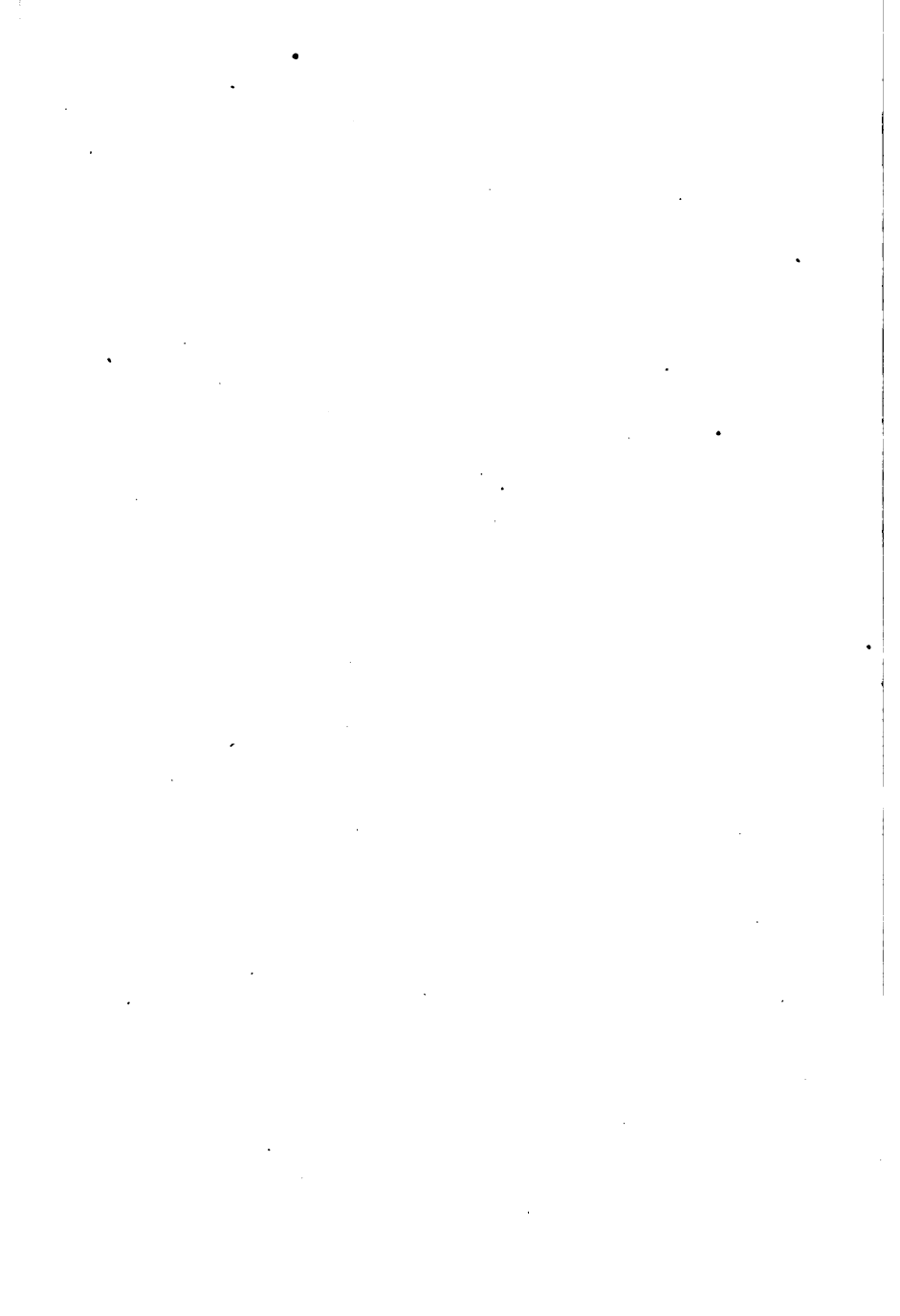


CHRONICLE OF
AN OLD TOWN
ALBERT BENJAMIN CUNNINGHAM

Fiction, American



NBC
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THE CHRONICLE OF AN OLD TOWN

A NOVEL

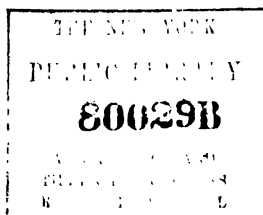
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F

TO A QUIET BUT KEEN OBSERVER
OF HUMAN LIFE, AND A VERY
SYMPATHETIC CRITIC:
WILLIAM DRUMMOND GREGORY

112132

CHAPTER I

"IS there any further business to consider?" The chairman of the Board asked the question with the constrained, nervous manner of the man who knows only too well that there is further business to consider—unpleasant business.

Followed a moment of strained silence, the while the chairman twirled a pencil nervously in his fingers, his eyes downcast upon it. The other men in the room, sitting very still, fixed their eyes vacantly on space, striving to look unconcerned. One of them glanced furtively at another, but encountering the other's glance wavering in his direction he averted his face quickly, as though caught in a disreputable act.

Some one shifted his position and the sound startled, rasping in the tense atmosphere of the room. The chairman started nervously, then made an effort to get himself in hand. But when he spoke his voice was querulous, fretful.

"Let us be prompt, gentlemen. Is there any further business?"

There was a general clearing of throats, a movement here and there, a restless shuffling of feet. Then Dr. Morgenthal arose.

"I guess I will say a few words, brothers," he began, his voice strangely vibrant.

He had occupied a front seat, and his rising put

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him in sight of all. He struck one at once as being a very large man, but his size did not give an impression of corresponding strength and physical vigor. He was a Great Dane, but he had been trampled, broken, and now all strength was gone from him.

He looked very tall and gaunt as he stood there, wavering in his attitude, hands trembling uncontrollably as he made effort to interlace his fingers in front of him. The expression on his face was of trouble, of great weariness.

"Doctor Morgenthal will speak to us," the chairman announced, his eyes lowered.

"Brothers," he began, and as he hesitated, still uncertain, his face twitched with deep emotion and he drew his under lip between his teeth—"brothers, I am aware that at this time the question of my remaining with you for another year is to be settled. I just want to present my side of the case to you.

"When I came here I was in the prime of my manhood. I took up the work with you and it prospered. We have learned to love one another. I have preached to you Sunday after Sunday of the unsearchable riches of the gospel, and you have been built up.

"I have baptized many of you; married your children; and others of you I have comforted when loved ones passed through the valley of the shadow. But last winter I got sick. I stood by the open grave with my head uncovered on that stormy day. It gave me cold. And, some way, I did not recover as quickly as I should. The ailment clung to me. I missed a few Sundays, but I had my pulpit supplied every day. Then my wife got sick—and my daughter—Brothers,



this has been a year of sorrows for me. I lost my daughter."

He unclasped his hands and put one up against a pillar, leaning heavily upon it; the other he held out, as if in supplication. He continued in short jerky sentences, his deep emotion still manifest in the twitching of his face.

"A year of sorrows, brothers. My wife—I have sat over there in the parsonage and seen her break. Some way she has failed. Doesn't seem to get about like she used to. Why, brothers," and his face lighted up, "I recall when she was just like a girl, running to meet me.

"Maybe I have neglected the church a little. But put yourself in my place. I have been sick—and now you are talking of a change of pastor. Not," he hastened to add, "that I shall not get better. I have the word of a specialist that my illness is only temporary. But I have been sick," he repeated, gently, "and now you want a change."

Several of the listeners moved in their seats. They were not looking at the speaker, but sat for the most part with arms crossed on their breasts, faces averted. The speaker continued, his hand still outstretched.

"I don't want to ask a favor of you; I just want you to put yourselves in my place. My wife—Brothers, she has labored among you all these years. And my daughter—and my home. Think of it, brothers!"

Suddenly he ceased speaking. It was as if he had been stricken dumb by terrible realization. Clearly for the first time he realized the significance of the

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deliberately expressionless faces before him. He interlaced his hands, eyes on the floor, broken, desolate, hopeless.

"But, brothers," gently again, "it is for you to decide. Only—think of it! And—and now if you will please to excuse me, I shall retire and learn your decision later."

The sound of his retreating footsteps on the walk outside floated through the open windows, receded, became fainter, died away. The Great Dane was dragging his broken body out of sight; the dying footsteps hinted at the limp, the hunted eyes.

For many minutes there was absolute silence in the room he had left. It was broken at last by Josiah Albertson, who arose, his eyes downcast, walked to the front of the room and faced about. His eyes, when lifted up to the waiting men, were moist. He swallowed; did not begin speaking at once.

"Gentlemen," he said at last, "I have never stood before you when I was so sore at heart. This is one of the hardest things I ever had to do. And if I should let my heart speak, you should hear something very different from what you shall hear. Doctor Morgenthal has won me to him, even as he has won you. I look to him as I would to my own father. But, gentlemen, I am not speaking for myself alone now. This church has chosen us as its representatives; and at a time like this we must voice its will as well as our own. While we all love him," with a gesture toward the door, "we all know that he should not stay here. His health is broken; he is a nervous wreck. He is not able for the work that is demanded here. To be blunt about it,

he is too old a man for this charge. I think the best thing is to tell him this: that for his own good he had better retire; get out of the active work. I think this would be kinder to him than to let him stay on here and be worried constantly by his failing health; to feel the congregation slipping from him and not be able to prevent it. I should like to hear from others."

There was another period of silence after he had concluded.

"Is there another to speak?" the chairman asked, easier now.

Edmund Howe arose.

"Brethren, I feel somewhat like Mr. Albertson. I do not have anything against Doctor Morgenthal, but I do feel my responsibility to the church, and believe it my duty to point out a few facts which we should consider—facts which may not be pleasant, which we would we did not have to face, but which in the interest of the church as a whole we must face. In the first place, our Sunday preaching services are running down. People come here for Sunday school, but after it is over they go right away from us and over to hear Doctor Richards. And the trouble is I cannot ask them to remain here for our preaching service. I am ashamed to"—and he smiled meaningly—"besides, they would not stay anyway: there is so little to stay for. Another thing: Doctor Morgenthal has made less than a hundred pastoral calls this year, according to exact information before me. Now, you can readily understand what that means in a church like ours."

The tension lessened perceptibly. The whole affair was becoming more businesslike, less tragic.

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"Brother Halleck," Edmund Howe continued, easily, encouraged by the manifest sympathy of his hearers, "you are our treasurer. Perhaps you had better speak of the other matter I have in mind. What do you think?"

"Well," began the treasurer, speaking emphatically, as was his wont, "I have this much to say: if he stays, he will not get his salary next year. The people won't pay it. I am not saying they ought or ought not; I am simply stating facts. The people don't like Doctor Morgenthal. They tell me they want a young man here, one who is a live wire and a good mixer, to get out and meet the people. For my part, I think that is more important than preaching; I get enough of that at home."

He sat down amidst many smiles. Halleck was all right, a plain, outspoken man who called a spade a spade.

Quickly followed a buzz of conversation. Each man felt free to speak to his neighbor, to thrash this thing out thoroughly. And it was all made easy now, placed on a strictly business basis. But an unexpected thing happened.

"Gentlemen," a somewhat tense voice carried above the low-pitched conversation and drew instant attention, not only because of its timbre, but also because of something very quiet and controlled about it, "I have not said anything up to this time because I was waiting to see just what the general opinion might be. Do I understand," he asked in the quiet tone of one seeking information, "that you want to turn this man off?"

There was no immediate answer. Then, "Is that right?" the voice persisted, now tense again.

"O, not exactly 'turn him off.' We simply want a change of pastor."

"But isn't that what it amounts to, really?"

"Will you guarantee his salary?" Halleck flared up.

"I'll guarantee my part of it. Will you?"

Immediately he sat down, the buzz of conversation broke out anew. Then Edmund Howe arose, suave, confident, but determined.

"Brethren," he began, "I trust we will view this affair calmly. Let us look facts in the face, remembering," he paused impressively, "that we are here as representatives of the whole church, and not of ourselves alone."

"Then you yourself don't want to turn him off?" It was the tense voice again.

"What we need here," Halleck burst out, jumping to his feet and shaking his fist in the air, "is a young man with pep. This old-man stuff has got to be cut out. Drag, drag, drag; sleep, sleep, sleep. Action—that's what we want. Movement, go, pep! And I won't be responsible for finances if we don't get it."

"But for your own part?"

"Question!" some one shouted impatiently.

"Do I hear a motion?" the chairman hinted.

"I move, Mr. Chairman, we vote for a change of pastor."

"You have heard the motion," the chairman stated, rising. "Are there any remarks?"

No one spoke.

"Question," impatiently.

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"All in favor of the motion, please stand."

All but two stood up.

"Shall we make it unanimous?"

There was no dissenting voice.

"I appoint Josiah Albertson to notify Doctor Morgenthal," the chairman continued. "Now shall we have a motion to adjourn?"

Edith Morgenthal, walking home past the church, observed that the light was still on in the business room, and observing, hastened her steps.

"What does it mean, mother?" she asked, once in the room. "I mean their being in there so late. It can't be——" she stopped abruptly, catching for the first time the expression of her mother's face.

"I don't know, Pattie," hurriedly. "It might be—— He's been sick, you know, for quite a while——"

"And so is everybody—one time or another. Don't you worry like that about dad!"

A step was heard without. The door opened and Dr. Morgenthal entered.

"Billy!" Mrs. Morgenthal cried as she ran toward him. She seized him by the lapels of his coat and searched his face anxiously.

"You don't mean——"

"I don't know, Winnie. At first I thought—of course it was all right! But then—then when I got to talking—they wouldn't look at me. It made me feel——" he hesitated, seeing Edith.

"Fiddlesticks, dad," she laughed, lightly. "You are nervous, that is all!" Then turning to Mrs. Morgenthal. "I am going for a walk, muddy," blushing

prettily, "and when I come back I want to find a different spirit here."

Her mother smiled after her until the door was closed. Then the smile receded and the anxious questioning look took its place.

"Tell me, Billy—everything."

"If you would as soon, Winnie, I'd like to be alone for a little while. You don't care?"

"But maybe I can help! If only you would tell me."

"Now, now, that is all right. You just run up." And even as he spoke he was turning toward the study.

She regarded him for a moment, an emotion which she constantly fought down and which she never expressed because she felt its sacrilege, struggling within her. It was a fierce jealousy that this man she loved carried his perplexities to God before baring them to her. She struggled with it now, hands clenched at her side. But she turned and went haltingly up the stairs.

He entered the study, closed the door and sat down at the table. For long he sat there, his head dropping lower and lower. At last his body fell forward on the table.

The fingers of one hand were run through his hair; the other hand groped about until it found a worn Bible. It closed upon it. Movement ceased. All was quiet.

When he lifted his face, it had changed profoundly, seamed into the tense vertical lines, such as one sees on the face of a man who is suffering great agony. It did not quiver now. It was set in a definite and hopeless resignation.

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He leafed through the Bible, found a stopping place and read from it. Again he fell forward upon the table. "O God, help thou my unbelief," he prayed.

At an upstairs window Mrs. Morgenthal stood waiting. She was stationed a little to one side, a hand holding back the curtain slightly.

Letting the curtain fall, she turned away, groping in the darkness. Her hand found the switch and pressed it, flooding the room with light. Going to the bureau she picked up a small oval frame done in gold and stood regarding it.

From out the frame a pair of clear eyes regarded her, and she drank in their depth, devouring the expression from the velvet forehead to the full volatile mouth. Suddenly she crushed the frame to her lips.

"O, Donna, my beauty, my little girl! Why did you have to go? That you were back with us now!"

She heard a sound. Quickly she sprang to the window and peered out. Then she recoiled, her hands pressed to her heart. It was Josiah Albertson.

She flung herself on the bed, face downward, clutching the covers convulsively. For what seemed an eternity she lay there, dry sobs now and then shaking her. . . . She lost track of time.

The front door closed.

"What was that—the door? Is he gone?"

From the window she saw Josiah Albertson disappearing down the street.

"He—he walks as if he is glad! Of course, silly—of course it's all right! It must be!"

From force of habit she put her hands to her hair, making deft little alterations.

"Now I shall go down and see for myself."

A strained anxious expression on her face, she peered into the study. Heber Morgenthal was kneeling at the table, his hands flung out over the litter of papers, his head on the worn Bible. For one moment of awful suspense she stood there, watching, breathless.

His shoulders heaved in a way she had never known but which she intuitively understood. She flew to his side, all the old tenderness aroused by his despair.

"Billy. What is it! Tell me!"

He lifted his face to her and the expression it held—dismay, despair, hopelessness—stabbed her with a numb cold pain.

"Darling! O, father, say something! Do you mean it?"

"They have voted for it, mother," he said, brokenly. "I am too old," and for the moment he looked at her the tense lines of his face again broke up, the lips trembled nervously. He lowered his head to hide it from her.

"But—why, dear, it can't be—too old—Pattie and the others! Billy! Where will we live?"

"But they have voted for it. I am too old."

Her expression changed. She laughed wildly.

"And after all these years!" Her voice rose shrilly, then of a sudden it became hard, bitter, revengeful. "The—the ingrates! To think you have labored and I have worked and given up——"

"Hush, hush, Winnie. Something may yet——"

"Something—nothing," she flared. "I hate it—*all!* I——"

"For shame, dear," he rebuked her, gently. "Is this

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the way we have taught others to bear up when their hour came? For shame!"

"But I don't care! It isn't fair. It isn't fair."

"Hush, mother, hush."

Slowly she gained control of herself, ceased her outcry, ceased to struggle. As the cold significance of the situation dawned upon her it left her numbed, overwhelmed. Then she broke out again, uncertain, perplexed.

"But—but we will have to move. This old house! We have made it, Billy. See that little shelf you put up for your concordance! O, I love it all so."

Then the storm broke, the emotion found expression in her tears. He drew her to him, stroking her hair in motherlike tenderness with his trembling hands. The storm passed. Her sobbing ceased.

"Maybe we had better ask for guidance now," he said.

"Yes, Billy," and they knelt together. His trembling hand groped for hers and finding it, closed upon it.

A soft breeze parted the green boughs outside, and a moonbeam, soft, silvery, tender, stole through the window and found them there. Then the boughs closed together again. It was night.

CHAPTER II

THE psychologists of our day—those wise citizens with their experimental methods and Van Dyke beards—tell us that the mind has a hankering after dates and places, the date to give an event perspective in the mental chronology, and the place to localize it and give it characteristic. And now, bowing to their decree, I shall attempt to give you the time and place of this chronicle.

As to the exact time, no definite period need be indicated. In many respects it might have been very recent; or, again, it might have been in almost any period during the last century.

For up where the events of this story take place time does not reel along at drunken pace, but has a way of leisure about it, even as an old man walking in the country of his neighbors has a way of stopping and conversing with his friends as he goes along.

In many sections of our modern world competition has a way of asserting itself and mercilessly pushing aside everything that does not make for commercial efficiency. To get ahead, to accumulate, to succeed, become the dominant passions.

When this occurs many of the old customs are quickly found to be anachronous; the human element in transactions is set aside as hindering the application of scientific method. And especially, when this

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occurs, nothing which wastes precious time may be tolerated for a moment.

But up where this story is laid, the old order has not been materially changed. Competition has not vanquished humanity: The old clerk is kept on in the store doing odd jobs; the very old man who mows the lawns of a summer is not so swift, but he keeps on with a great respect.

Here generations overlap, the newer doing as the older did. Old Uncle Hi does little but pet his chickens, but he is a blue-blooded aristocrat and a philosopher of human life; Sally Bay scrubs her kitchen and polishes her stove in the morning, washes the dishes in the afternoon, then dresses up and goes to her club the peer of anyone; while Hope Erksen carefully cleans his arctics under the vigilant eye of his wife, then goes to a meeting of the village council and says how the town ought to be run.

And this is essentially as it used to be, back in the time when our ancestors lived over in the rocky sections of the East, learned frugality in dealing with the infertile acres, and acknowledged not a single superior.

So you see no particular period need be set for this story, since time does not really count. The old order drones on with the contented hum of the bumblebee that zigzags over the clover field caring more for the going than for the ground nest at the end of the way.

Time comes near standing still, for the people live leisurely. When one walks down the street he goes with unhurried step; he speaks to those he meets, stopping to pat the fat baby whose mother is wheeling it out for an airing. He arrives at his destination, passes

the time of day, bargains shrewdly, and then lingers a while to talk.

And where is this place? Do you recall that period in American history when years ago there was contention among the original colonies over their western boundaries? When Maryland wanted a large share of the western lands, and Virginia claimed that her border extended west and northwest to the furthest limits of the United States?

Well, it was then that Connecticut reserved the ownership of a part of northeastern Ohio, known to this day as the Western Reserve. And it is in this Western Reserve that you will find the little town of Paxton.

You take the car that leaves Cleveland at noon, and arrive in Paxton the middle of the afternoon. As you walk up the street you see that the houses are set well back, that they are for the most part big at both ends and narrow in the middle, and that the wood house is connected with the kitchen.

You are impressed that there is shade here, deep, cool, restful shade, although you left a glistering heat in the city. But you understand when you notice the maples—great-bowled rugged trees that tower high and reach interlacing fingers across the streets and lock hands overhead.

The first man you meet is a little short fellow with a white beard and a soft eye. He speaks to you, albeit you never saw him before. He is Uncle Hi, who raises his chickens down under the hill. It would pay you to make his acquaintance.

As you go up the street you are the object of careful

and deliberate scrutiny from a source you dream not. It comes from the house over to your right there under the maples, the house with the roses over the porch.

Mrs. Erksen lives there. Some people say she does her housework at night so as not to miss seeing anything in the day time; but really no one knows this to be true. But she does always seem to have her work done; and she never seems to miss anything.

She sees you coming. She takes stock of your plaid suit and estimates its texture; she sees your hat and nods her head as if to say it is like most men from the city are wearing this summer; she observes your bag, that it is light tan—and she stores all this information carefully away.

She snips off a thread with her teeth as her sharp eyes follow you. But you go on all unconscious, coming at last to the square where are the stores and the Office. Out ahead there is the park, where the town meetings used to be held, but where now is a wonderful grove of maples where big fat squirrels play among the branches. You remain in town but an hour, but in that hour Paxton has sized you up, labeled you, and laid all facts pertaining to you carefully away.

And, essentially, that is Paxton. It is a town of sharp-eyed economical people who are ready to stop and talk to you; a place where there is much shade in the summer and deep snows in the winter; a place of a certain quiet, droning peace.

How old is Paxton? Surely, no one knows that exactly, though there are marks of great age. Uncle Hi says he remembers when there was a pair of bars leading into a cow pasture where the Office now stands.

But the stones of the Office steps are worn down thin, so that must have been a long, long time ago.

"How old be Paxton?" Uncle Hi repeated, reflectively, when asked the question. "Air ye acquaint with Cleveland?"

"Some."

"I mind," he answered, smilingly, "when folks used to come here from Cleveland to git their winter clothes."

And doubtless he was right. Paxton claims her six hundred souls, and Cleveland boasts that she is the sixth city, yet Paxton was a thriving village when Cleveland was a mere stripling.

Mrs. Erksen sat in her bay window, her lap filled with gray yarn. From where she sat she got a complete view of the street in both directions: she had built the bay on to the front room so she could.

Across the street she saw a woman, hurrying.

"Sally Bay," she nodded. "I wonder where she be goin' sech a warmish day?" Then as the identified Mrs. Bay turned in at her own door she cast a quick glance about the room to make absolutely sure everything was just right, and called a welcome.

"Come in, Sally Bay! I be knittin' my Hope's socks. I say to him, 'I knit your socks when we was married, and I knit them now.' It be a right warm day, Sally Bay."

"It be," Sally assented, absently. Clearly the topic of the weather failed to interest her to-day, though usually she was quite excited over it, taking a peculiar delight in making comparisons with past seasons. But

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now she seemed disturbed by some inward tension: Her tone betrayed that her interest lay elsewhere.

Mrs. Erksen sensed this, and while she ceased not from her knitting, her eyes probed her visitor's face sharply, as if to divine this hidden interest. Sally Bay's husband kept the Office, and this very often gave her an unfair advantage. Postal cards and tell-tale packages——

But Mrs. Erksen did not manifest too great a curiosity. Indeed, aside from her probing eyes she might have been actually indifferent. But Sally Bay was not deceived; rather, she was determined to make the most of the moment.

"Heard about Vic Kline and Lilly Barbour?" she asked, casually.

Now, Victor Kline was a fine, strapping young man of dark complexion and a shock of black, curly hair, in whose matrimonial future all the village of Paxton naturally took keen interest. But girls had come and girls had gone, leaving him, at the tantalizing age of twenty-eight, absolutely heart free.

But when Lilly Barbour had arrived the fall before to take up her duties as teacher in the high school, her vivacious manner, coupled with a becoming modesty and eyes so deep blue that they seemed almost black, Victor Kline had displayed an interest so instant and so marked as to cause all Paxton to sit up and take notice.

Lilly had returned for her second year but a scant three weeks before, slightly more confident and vastly more radiant than ever before; and her coming had set Victor to preening himself shamelessly. Consequently

when Sally Bay mentioned this particular couple, and in such a way as to indicate that an actual contribution to knowledge was imminent, Mrs. Erksen experienced difficulty in maintaining her attitude of tolerant indifference.

"You mean——?" she encouraged, again searching her visitor's face.

"I don't care!" Sally Bay burst out with unexpected vehemence. "I like Lilly! She is a good girl and the best teacher we ever had. She comes down to visit my Hallie every week," as if this explained her fondness. "And when Vic Kline acts like that I think it a dirty shame!"

Mrs. Erksen almost dropped a stitch, so great was her interest. But she held her pose magnificently. "It do be a shame," she said.

"You heard about it?"

"Just what, Sally Bay?"

"Vic Kline has run off to York State and left her! You mind Maggie Volten? He went with her two years ago. But, law, he couldn't care for her. Her, a widow! You know she went to York State when she had that property left her there."

"I know," impatiently.

"And now Vic's gone over to her."

"No!"

"He has. And all for a little money! It gets them all," Sally continued, scornfully. "He ought to be tarred and feathered. Lilly's all broke up, I know."

"But wasn't your Hallie goin' to have a shower for her?"

"She was, and the invitations all out! But we will

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go ahead any way. All I can say is, if he don't come back, that girl ain't goin' to be made suffer for him."

So this was the secret of Sally Bay's preoccupation! Victor Kline had run away, on the eve of a linen shower for his fiancée, lured by the flicker of an old flame and many acres.

"But," continued Sally, bitterly, "it's all in the way they are brought up. What kind of raisin' did Vic Kline have? I says to my Fred that none of my children's grewed up that way."

"I wonder does his parents know this?"

"Law, and what would they care if they did?"

"Old Guiraud," Mrs. Erksen announced, glancing down the street. "I pity that poor old man—living down there alone!"

"Have you heard about our new minister yet?"

"Not just yet. Have you?"

"But I hope we get one with a family, now that the parsonage has plenty of room in it."

"Did you want a young one?"

"And have him nag the life out of us? Well, you don't know me, Mrs. Erksen, asking that."

"When he comes we will find out about him," glancing down the street once more. "The car is a little late. Two got on, but none off. I wonder where old Guiraud be goin'?"

A heavy step sounded on the back porch, at which Sally Bay arose.

"Law, and I can't stay any longer. Come over, Mrs. Erksen."

"'N you come back, Sally Bay."

Hope Erksen came through from the kitchen. He

always came through from the kitchen, as it never seemed to occur to him to use his front door.

He was up in years—old enough to have been through the war. What with his white hair and ragged white moustache, he might have passed for a venerable patriarch. But he was not, after all, a man of dignity. His merry, twinkling eye belied his silvery hair; and his fondness for good jokes and plenty of company did not fit with the austere dignity of the pompous man.

"I ha' been to the store," he began on entering, "and I hearn——"

But here she interrupted him, looking keenly at his feet, which were covered with dust, as were the bottoms of his trousers.

"Go, pa, and brush that off before you rub it on my rugs and chairs."

"And I hearn," reentering, "that we be a-goin' to have a new minister, mebbe."

"You did?" with chill response. "Well, I could a told you that."

"But you couldn't a told me who he be."

"'N I doubt whether you could, Hope Erksen."

"Mebbe I could, and mebbe I couldn't."

"Now, if——"

"He maught be a man with a family."

"Is he a——"

"And he maught be well along, though I ain't sayin' he is."

"You tell me his name and all about him!"

"Name? Cricky, if I didn't forgit his name. But I do know as haow he——"

The telephone rang, a long, a short and a long, and

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she hurried to answer it. He sat listening, his old mind working to make out the aggravating one-sided conversation.

"No. Have you?"

"Well, I guess we had as well. It'll be somebody, one way or another, I reckon."

"That 'ud be the only place to have it—we could go over it and fix it up."

"Well, cake and coffee and some kind of sandwiches."

"Naow, listen. We can't do it here. I'll come up there—Yes, now. Right up. Good-by."

"What is it?" Hope Erksen asked.

"The reception of the new minister."

"Who be it?" and his eagerness totally belied his veiled hint that he possessed that information himself.

"Mebbe I know an' mebbe I don't," for his earlier manner still rankled. She hurried out, leaving him there.

For a considerable time he sat as she had left him. Then he arose, slowly, with his hands at his back. He opened a corner door, revealing a stairway to the second floor. He ascended, came out in a small hallway where there were other doors. One of these—a very small one—he opened to reveal a second stairway, only this one was very steep and narrow. Closing the door behind him, he mounted, emerging finally in an attic.

It was a large attic, with drop-ceilings at the sides

and two narrow windows at either end, which let in a subdued but sufficient light.

The room did not have the immaculate lady-kept appearance of the other rooms of the old house. It gave every evidence of being man-guarded. Papers and magazines were scattered about on the floor. The furniture was very old, as if it had been brought up here when discarded below, but it was exceedingly comfortable: old painted rockers with wicker backs and hickory-slit seats on which were very old cushions; a table where were a gun and an old shot-pouch with powder horn; and a smaller table on which were a number of old pipes, and a cake-dish filled with natural leaf tobacco.

As he entered this room a new air of proprietorship took possession of him. The subdued manner left him; he kicked a magazine out of his way, jostled a chair as he proceeded to the south window, where he let himself down in a chair whose cushion looked as if it had never been fluffed up.

He took off his shoes and rubbed his feet a little, then extended them to another chair which stood to indicate it had known similar service before.

Reaching over, he picked up a pipe and filled it, putting it in his mouth and puffing at it, unlighted. Next he got a checkerboard, set it on his knees and studied it intently. He wanted to find a quick way of penning one man with two in the lower right.

A door slammed far below him, causing him to lift his head.

"Grampa! O, grampa," he heard a small voice calling.

He sat perfectly still, his old face alight.

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"Grampa, where are you?" the small voice rose shrilly, its owner close to tears.

He waited another moment, then tiptoed to the door.

"Up here, honey," he called.

There was the sound of hurrying feet on the stairs; the attic door was thrown open and a little boy of four bounded into the room. He ran over and climbing on to the old man's knees, hugged him with all his might.

"Naow, naow! What does grampa's boy want?"

The little fellow hung his head, speechless.

"Tell in grampa's ear what he wants."

The small red mouth puckered close to the old ear, the lips moved, and the little head jerked back, studying the old face.

Hope Erksen became mysterious. He put the boy down, stood up and looked about him in a distressed manner.

"I wonder if there be any. Naow, if I can only look in the right place! And if I don't get the right place the first time, won't be no need to look again. Hope I don't miss it."

He continued to look about him, puzzled, anxious, perplexed, while the little boy stood watching him, fairly breathless in his excitement.

He pulled out a drawer of the big table, poked a finger at a bag he saw there. He pulled it out, looked into it.

"Cricky, I found it," he chuckled. "The first time too."

He took out three round peppermint balls and placed them in the small hand that was stretched to receive

them. Grampa squatted while two arms were again placed about his neck.

"What do you say?"

"Thank you, grampa."

"What else?"

"I will not tell mamma."

"Naow, be a good boy," he said, rising.

He heard the door slam far below as he settled again on the old cushion. He eased his leg up slightly, drawing his trousers tight, then drew a match across them quickly. The flame sputtered, burned steadily. He held it over the bowl, puffing until the smoke came out blue and heavy. Then he took the pipe from his mouth and looked from the window.

A great maple sent its branches close in, where they hung green and still. The warm air, smelling faintly of the fields, floated into the room. There was no sound, save the vague murmurings of a summer's day.

Across in the neighbor's yard a playful puppy was rolling down the terrace where the grass had but recently been cut, getting up and rolling down again. While going through this operation his own tail attracted his attention.

He caught himself, got up and looked at it curiously. He snapped at it, only to have it jerk away. He was aggrieved, but resolved. He started whirling after it in a circle, the tantalizing member always just beyond the yawning mouth.

Hope Erksen, seeing all, chuckled to himself.

"Reminds me o' some people," he said.

CHAPTER III

NEVER had the discordant jargon of the city seemed so dominant, so imperious and insistent in its mechanical blare as it seemed that morning to Dr. Morgenthal.

He was on his way to the station, accompanied by his wife and daughter, the former holding his arm and shrinking toward him, the latter walking confidently at his right.

They were crossing the street when the shrill clang of a trolley car disputed their right-of-way; and hardly had they hurried across the tracks when they started back perilously to avoid the big truck that lumbered by with a hoarse warning.

When they reached the sidewalk, Dr. Morgenthal wiped his forehead with an uncertain hand.

"Do you know, Winnie, it all gets on my nerves," with a wave of the hand to include everything. "It is too swift, too—hard."

A newsboy came up crying his wares, trying to make his voice distinct above the roar, and screeching to do so. Heavy wagons, loaded with ice and coal and piled high with merchandise, jolted raggedly, the drivers now indolent, now sawing furiously on the lines. A huckster, his little cart laden with oranges and bananas, hurried along to avoid blocking the traffic.

"Sometimes I wonder whether man is built to stand it," Dr. Morgenthal continued as they made their way

forward. "It is too much of a strain, too tearing. Men are killed here."

The sidewalk narrowed, issuing in a covered tunnel open at one side, where was a mass of debris, and where grimy workmen of many tongues swore hoarsely at each other the while they carried great burdens of lumber and mortar, their countenances sullen and rebellious.

"This is the new skyscraper," Edith announced with interest.

They arrived at the station—a smoke-blackened building of gray granite with its vast sheds stretching away and resounding with the rumble of engines and rattle of baggage trucks.

They found Earl already there, draped lazily over a seat, awaiting them. He had chosen to come alone, at a time and by a route convenient to himself.

"Train starts in fifteen minutes," he began in his high treble. "From track nine. The tickets for all of us will be sixty dollars. Add five for Pullman reservations you made yesterday." Thus did his thirteen years manifest themselves in his wisdom.

For Dr. Morgenthal, having been released from his work in the Eastern city, was on his way to the Middle West for a summer in the country. His household goods were stored subject to call; and he planned that when he called for them——

Yes, there was a plan, somewhat vague, just a little uncertain, but a plan nevertheless. He was for thrashing out the details just as soon as they were settled on the train, but his wife would not hear of it.

"We will not talk about it—now. Let's wait until

we have had a good long rest and then fix it all up. It will be something to look forward to," she added, brightly.

But although it was so decided, Dr. Morgenthal found it difficult those first weeks to keep his mind off the Thing that had befallen him, and more difficult still to keep from laying plans for the future with its perplexities and difficult adjustments.

But in time nature did for him what his own distracted will could not do. The mornings with the triumphant sun and the dew-sprinkled fields got into his blood and raced it with primitive energy; the long days when he followed the plow and made pretense of straightening up the corn or doing little odd jobs about the place were as lubricant to his old joints, while the evenings spent on the porch in indolent, low-voiced conversation with the voices of the night sounding across the fields gave him a sense of rest that enabled him to seek his bed in peace.

But the vacation was coming to a close, and as August gave way to September, Mrs. Morgenthal saw that which caused her to begin to suffer again all the old anxieties. She observed him, that his look was more and more anxious, his manner increasingly restless, and she knew the cause. He was beginning to grapple with the Plan; and she knew it could no longer be put off. But she dreaded to broach it.

For whether he realized it or not—he did not and there lay the difficulty—there was a certain issue that had to be faced. People might say he was too old—Josiah Albertson had—and being too old, he might not be given an appointment.

But there were certain things that might be done. . . . She had heard of it. . . . But how could she manage it without his knowing, and knowing, understand that she thought——

Her mind flew back across the years and she visualized him back there, big, confident, dominating, his Herculean stature compelling admiration and confidence—and even as she thought, she saw him over in the field straining at a child's task.

A scene from an old volume that had burned itself on her memory years ago because of its weird tragedy came back to her now and she meditated its import, little dreamed when the story was first read:

And it was the custom in the house of Suddhodana, the rajah, to send out Siddhartha, the beautiful young man, with the servant, that he might walk through the winding ways of Kapilavastu and behold his people, the Sakyas.

And on a day as they were wandering along, the young man, the beautiful young man, the Muni, in the glory of his strength and the first fine flush of his manhood, looked, and behold, an old man.

The hands of the old man were withered, and the flesh of his cheeks sunken in. The eyes had receded into their sockets, and the lips, drawn tight, revealed the outlines of his teeth, even as famine reveals the ribs of the camel. He walked with a stoop, and the cane with which he sought support, was not more certain than his feet.

Then the beautiful young man of the Kshatriya, turning to the servant who followed, said, "Behold, the old man."

"The old man," answered the servant, sadly, "is where we shall be, but let a few more summers pass over our heads."

Then the young man, the beautiful young man, the Gautama, looked at his own firm hand and felt the rhythm of the muscles as he put down his foot with confidence. But lifting his head he beheld again, and lo, the old man, shriveled and decayed. And he answered the servant, himself now sad,

"But, and is this the end?"

"Aye, it is the end," replied the servant.

"But, and is there no deliverance?"

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"It is the law," replied the servant. "Youth, strength; old age, and decay."

Then the young man, the beautiful young man, Siddartha, rent his garments, and said, "I am sad."

His friends, seeing him go, called after him to return, but he was heard to mutter, "But, and is this the end?" as he went into the desert to struggle with the Mara.

And now she understood that the old tragedy had come to her. She knew she could not escape it; realized that it was inevitable. But woman she was, she could postpone it. There were things that could be done, if she could but broach them without letting him see.

She must never destroy this confidence of his—that he was strong as ever—only a little sick temporarily.

She saw him coming toward her, confident and cheerful, unconscious of any breaking-up of his powers.

"Hello, Winnie. Just like the old days!"

She sat in a rocker on the porch, and he came over and sat down on the steps. He crossed one leg over the other, and she was struck by its thinness. It seemed almost flat, crossed there over the other, the flesh shrunken away.

I have it from a man who knows that a dog was wounded to the death and lay dumb and miserable in his last blind agony, while a brute stood by and watched. A second dog came up, whined sympathetically, and licked her old comrade's wound. Then, noting the curious stare of the brute standing by, she covered the crippled body with her own, not, seemingly, to relieve it, but to protect it from the insolent apathetic stare of the brute, which was outrage.

Mrs. Morgenthal got up quickly, went over to the

steps and threw her arms about her husband, straining him passionately to her heart. And then before he could recover himself, she had left him and was groping for the stairs, blinded by her own tears. When she descended an hour later Edith greeted her cheerily.

"Dad's just been telling me of the first sermon he intends to preach to his new congregation. It is a big one—though he says he is not going to preach his biggest ones first," and she laughed gayly.

"D-did he say anything more?"

"O, he has it all figured out. He is not going to hold any revival the first year—going to study his field first."

Then after a moment's silence, during which the older woman struggled with herself, she continued, "He says he is glad now he had to give up that old church, for he has always wanted to come out here. And since the Conference over there came in the spring and this one comes in the fall, it has been nice for him—this long vacation in between."

And it was then, even as her daughter was speaking, that Mrs. Morgenthal knew what she should do. As in a flash she realized and formulated her whole course of action.

Conference came the third week in September, and in the first week, heart beating wildly, but outwardly calm, Mrs. Morgenthal took the first step in her plan.

"Billy, I believe we need some more clothes, now that it is so near Conference."

"You can have whatever you want, and the children. I guess I can get along very nicely."

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Her heart sank at his words. She had always had this trouble with him, but now it simply could not be allowed to interfere.

"Then what do you say that we go to the city and look around a little?"

"I had hoped I might stay right here to the last day. It is the most restful place I have ever been in."

"But just for a day. That won't hurt you," she pressed.

And so it was that Friday found them in the city. Patiently he went with her to department store after department store, looked as she tried on the various garments and gave his opinion as to their beauty, only to chide gently when she should leave without a purchase.

"If we might look in at the windows. I don't just like to have them get down so many things and then not buy anything."

"But, Billy, that's all they have to do," she answered, eagerly, entering another store.

But in time she felt, with a pang of remorse, that, coming to the city to work out a part of her plans for him, she had forgotten him in her own absorbing interests. She suppressed her desire to explore further, pulled herself from the very threshold of an inviting palace, and took up her original task.

They walked down the street to a large clothing store, where the windows were artistically filled with men's suits; and she knew that her task would be difficult.

"Look, Billy, at the suits in the windows. Aren't they pretty?"

He swept the window with an indifferent eye. "Mostly for young fellows," he replied.

"There, look at that dark blue one. I have always wanted you to have a suit of that color."

"But not of that cut. In that I would look like one of the old women in short dresses you see these days."

"Let's go in and look at them."

With a tolerant smile he followed her within, where they were met promptly by a smiling young man.

"We saw the blue serge in the window—my husband—" she said, just a little breathlessly.

"Just step right this way."

The coat was tried on, and Dr. Morgenthal stood before the mirror and surveyed himself with just the slightest touch of embarrassment.

"Have you the same color in a little soberer——"

"But I think this is so becoming! Don't you?" turning to the salesman, eagerly. "So clear-cut and different."

"It surely does become him."

"But," he turned in surprise, "surely you see this is not just what I should have."

"Do get it!" she urged, bright spots showing in either cheek. "I think it is just lovely."

He went out with it under his arm, but with an uncertain air about him.

"Winnie, I'll be ashamed to wear this thing," he said.

"No, you won't. It is just because it is different from what you have been wearing. Look, nearly every man you see has one like it."

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They had gone perhaps a block when she stopped, uttering a little cry of dismay.

"I forgot my handkerchief in that store! It was one Edith gave me for Christmas. I must go back for it."

"I'll go back. You just wait here."

"No, no, no. You don't need to. I can run right back."

"We will both go."

But she was already hurrying away. "I shall be right back. You wait here."

She reentered the store, flushed but triumphant.

"We forgot," she said to the smiling young man. "I want three white shirts, plaited bosoms."

"And the size?"

"F-fourteen."

"And what else?"

"And a half dozen collars, fourteen and a half," pointing out to him the style.

With the bundles under her arm, she rejoined her husband. To her delight, he was preoccupied and did not notice. Together they started for the depot, when of a sudden she hung back.

"Let's go back up to that big store, Billy. I just want——"

He looked at his watch.

"I guess there is time. Forgot something else?"

"No," she hesitated, "I just want——"

They reentered the big department store where she had spent an ecstatic hour earlier in the day. A clerk recognized them and approached, attentive.

"I just wanted to look at those dresses again."

"Certainly."

Soon the young lady was holding before her a beautiful dress—a silk crepe of old gold that fell from the hanger in soft folds, from which the bright chain figures of the front and sides peeped out with alluring eyes.

"This is the one, isn't it?"

"Yes, this is it."

Putting out her hand, she drew it to her, running the soft material through her fingers, shading it to the light, then stood up and held it against her, looking down at the effect; stepping back quickly, and again noting the result.

"Isn't it just wonderful!" she exclaimed again and again.

"It is a fine garment," he answered her.

At last she straightened and searched his face closely.

"Do you think, Billy," with a look down at the soft lines, "that we—that we——"

"It may be," he answered promptly, pleasantly. "How much is it?"

She reached for the little tag and held it in her hand as though to hide it, clutching it defensively. Then she held it out for him to see.

When he saw it, his face became grave.

"I am afraid—is it so much? If we only——"

The color receded from her face, leaving it white. She caught the garment to her, as though forcibly to make it her own. But not for long. Her attitude relaxed, the blood rushing back to her face and flushing it crimson. She smiled at him, handing the dress back to the clerk who stood beside her.

"Certainly," she said, her voice the least bit unsteady. "I should have remembered."

"The suit, Winnie!" he said, triumphantly. "I can take it back, and then we can, all right."

"Not at all. I really don't need this." And to the clerk, "I guess I will not take it to-day," she said.

The elevator dropped slowly, giving her a last glimpse of the room. She saw the clerk disappearing into a recess with the garment of old gold. Involuntarily her hand lifted, as though to detain her. But she let it fall and turned brightly to her husband.

"Now we are ready to go home."

On reaching home she slipped up to their room and opened a bureau drawer. A number of white shirts, freshly laundered, but marked size sixteen, she took out and replaced them with her purchase. A number of collars, also size sixteen, were removed to make room for the newer ones.

" . . . has shrunken so, and it does make such a big difference!" she mused gently to herself.

A few days before he started for Conference he got his hair cut, and to please his wife, he asked the barber to cut it very short, especially behind.

Then the morning he was to leave he put on one of his new shirts, never once suspecting the substitution, and one of the new collars also. It fitted his neck snugly, taking ten years from his age. Then putting on the new suit, he stood smartly erect as he always did when conscious of being correctly dressed.

When she surveyed him she laughed happily, a little catch of joy in her throat. She had stood between him

and the Brute Thing out there, and so well! He looked ever so much younger, more compact.

"And now good-by and God bless you!" she cried, hugging him. "Don't forget to telegraph me the minute the appointments are read."

When he reached the seat of the Conference there was something of the old imperiousness in his bearing that had made him a man among men in the old days. His familiarity with routine, his comprehensive grasp of affairs of importance; above all, his attitude of expecting consultation in critical moments, soon made of him a respected figure.

He did not wait long before he sought out a district superintendent and laid his case before him.

"My brother," this man said, "I certainly wish it were possible for me to do something for you. But just now my district is full. I tell you what, though," he added, hurriedly, when he saw the effect of his words, "if anything turns up I shall be glad to let you know."

He saw a brother superintendent leaving the building, and held up his hand to detain him. With an "Excuse me a minute, please," he left Dr. Morgenthal. Soon several superintendents were collected together.

"Dr. Morgenthal? O, yes. Comes from the East, doesn't he?"

"Gave out over there, I understand," and the speaker, an old man himself, shook his head. "It is coming to all of us, brothers. It is coming to all. And may God help us when it does!"

"Amen."

"But what shall we tell him?"

"I'd rather not think of it."

"But we must."

"I fear there is nothing for him."

And indeed, as the days went by, it seemed this was the case. Dr. Morgenthal himself was among the first to sense it. He felt the constraint that fell on the men when he approached; was quick to interpret the evasive answers, the sympathetic wish for his welfare.

He lost the old air of confidence. His imperious bearing left him. Instead, he became just a little apologetic in his attitude. He betrayed his self-consciousness by endeavoring to appear critical in his conversation when in reality he preferred to be passive, in making an effort at energetic activity when he fain would have sat quietly by.

The days passed. More and more he spent the time down in the rest room, writing to his wife. "I am sometimes almost afraid," he wrote on one occasion. "There is something in the attitude of the brethren—something kind and tolerant—mother, it frightens me. I cannot understand it. But I can rely on the exceeding great and precious promises that are ours!"

The old nervousness was returning. When the conversation touched his prospects he found that the twitching in his face would return in spite of himself. He studied the situation in the mirror and found that by stiffening the muscles of his neck he could in a measure control himself.

But it got until even this would do no good. The Conference was nearly over, and he had been given no promises whatever. Finally, unable to stand the suspense longer, he sought out the district superintendent, the very old man, whom he found easier to

approach than the others. His name, he had learned, was Hancher, Dr. Hancher.

"Doctor," he began, "I want to know the truth. Am I not to be given any work?"

They were standing in the book room, with the usual crowd jostling friendlily about.

"Just step over here, brother," Dr. Hancher said, "where there is not so much confusion."

They went over to a corner where it was comparatively quiet. Dr. Hancher did not begin speaking at once, but stood facing a map that hung on the wall, his fingers in his vest pockets. When he turned, he put a hand on the other's shoulder.

"Brother, I am an old man, and because I am, I can talk to you. For next year when my time is up on the district, I face the same thing you face now.

"Why was I put on the district?" his voice raised in his forgetfulness of the situation. "Because I was too old for a regular pastorate. The demand to-day, brother, is for young men—men with energy and new ideas. We older men have got to step back."

"Does that mean," his face seaming suddenly, "that——"

Dr. Hancher put out his hand impulsively and seizing the other's gripped it hurriedly.

"Brother! Brother! God bless you." There were tears in his eyes as he turned away.

Nothing had affected Dr. Morgenthal as had this conversation. For the first time it made him doubt himself. He began actually to question his own powers. He studied himself in the mirror that night, as he had been doing of late.

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"You can do your best, brother, and no one can do more."

And on Tuesday, after the appointments were read, he went to the telegraph office and in a manner a little exultant, albeit a little timid and uncertain, he sent the following to his wife:

"Our charge is Paxton."

CHAPTER IV

MRS. ERKSEN sat in the bay, her lap filled with gray yarn. She had finished one sock, and was turning the heel of the second. Both were to her satisfaction.

The midday car, eastbound, gave its colorless toot down by the old, abandoned factory, and a moment later jerked into the station. Mrs. Erksen hitched round the least bit.

"I wish they got off on this side, 'stead of the other," she said in an aggrieved tone.

A moment later a large man, very tall, came in sight round the car. He held a suitcase in one hand, and pointed up the street with the free hand, as if confirming a direction. Uncle Hi came round the car, and himself pointed up the street, motioning toward the southwest.

The tall man bowed courteously, turned left face and beckoned. Soon he was joined by others—two ladies and a very tall young lad. Mrs. Erksen nodded with certainty.

"It be him," she said.

She watched the quartet as they came up the street, commenting on each in turn.

"He do 'pear an old man. Wait till my Hope finds that out! His wife be the one in gray, a leetle mite stoutish. Tired, too, poor thing! Kind of drawed

over. But she's keepin' right up. But the young lady! Mebbe she doesn't hold up her head! But I know her kind, like my Hope's brother's daughter—a little wild-cat, but big inside. I must find out how she has that trimmin' fixed on her hat. I could work it on mine—narrower and a mite closer in. The boy don't count. Turnin' fourteen, mebbe. Jest about time for his voice to be changin'. I hope he 'tends prayer meetin' as a pattern."

All unconscious, either of this scrutiny or the remarks his company occasioned, Dr. Morgenthal and his family made their way up the hill.

"Winnie, already I love the place!"

"The restful place! See the big maples and the dear houses set so far back. Notice that one over there," pointing her finger.

Mrs. Erksen started back as the finger pointed in her direction, reddening. Hastily she moved back from the bay—then smiled easily.

"The yellow curtains! I most forgot. They shut out everything. She was pointin' at my house," with pride.

Edith Morgenthal walked beside Earl, stepping along serenely, head held high in the justifiable consciousness of the beautiful hat which already had been noticed and admired. Or was she just a little self-conscious as she entered this new town as the always conspicuous minister's daughter, and did this account for her almost too confident manner?

"I might go out and stop 'em," Mrs. Erksen nodded over her yarn. "But they will soon find out and be comin' back."

She watched them until they were out of sight, then putting her knitting aside she went out to the kitchen. A fire was burning briskly in the range, kettles singing on top. But she opened the door of the oven and peeped in. A chicken was slowly browning in the big roaster, and the savor greeted her pleasantly.

"How be you comin' on?" poking it testingly with a fork. "Um, mebbe you will be all right!" But it was really the assertion of a conviction and not a fluttering expression of doubtful hope. She did not make so much fuss as some, but her victuals were usually fit to eat, if she did say it herself.

She put a clean towel on the nail by the sink; took a small whisk broom and brushed some imaginary ashes from the glistening black stove and left the kitchen. She ascended the stairs and opened the small door leading to the attic.

"Hope Erksen, be you there?" she called.

No answer.

"I know ye be, for that horrid smoke is scentin' up the whole house. You will jest have to quit it while the people are here."

Still no answer, but in the old chair by the window Hope Erksen put down his pipe with a sigh. His wife went into a bedroom and ran her hand down a snow-white counterpane. She peeped into the water-pitcher to make sure she had not forgotten. There were two beds in the room, and she regarded them doubtfully.

"I don't know what to do 'baout it, whether to put the boy or the girl in here with 'em." She puzzled over this problem for a moment, then looked into the adjoining room, which wore an expectant air.

"I'll jest tell them here's their rooms, and let them fix it to suit themselves," she concluded, energetically.

Steps sounded on the porch below, and soon there was a knocking on the front door. She hastened down.

"And is this Sister Erksen?" Dr. Morgenthal asked when she appeared at the door.

"It be," she answered after the manner of her kind: rather sharply, but with considerable uncertainty covered up by the outward manner. "And you be our new minister and family, I vow. Come right along in."

"This is my wife, Mrs. Morgenthal, and this is Earl my son, and this is my daughter, Edith."

Her attitude toward each was characteristic. Toward Mrs. Morgenthal it held just the slightest hint of antagonism, but also a certain air of awaiting further developments. Toward Earl she was indifferent, as if, after all, he did not particularly count. But at Edith she looked for a brief second noncommittally, only to lean toward her in the end and give her hand a little squeeze.

"Naow," energetically, "I 'low you be wanting to go up and wash up a bit after your trip. It is warmish and kind of close."

When they were in their rooms with the door closed, she hurried breathlessly to the attic and greeted her husband in a tragic whisper.

"Hope Erksen, you got to come daown!"

"All right. All right," he acquiesced with the air of a martyr. "I'll be daown."

It was at dinner that they all got together—dinner, as ever at Paxton, being at midday. Dr. Morgenthal returned thanks with the ease and graciousness of one

through whose mind the words and phrases run in well-worn grooves.

Hope Erksen stood to carve the chicken, and it was clear that the task was congenial to him. This was so far from what Dr. Morgenthal had expected, that he was astonished. He had looked for the embarrassed bungling of the outdoor man at unfamiliar task. Had he known it—as he did later—two centuries of rugged work-molded character as fine and stalwart as ever held gavel in council hall, stood at the end of the table.

He brought out his old jokes without having to trouble himself to recall whether to these particular people he had ever told them; and telling them, he laughed in his peculiar way until his ragged little moustache stood out in clownish disorder.

“And, you, brother—I reckon you be like the lady when axed did she want white or dark meat, said both! Here be nice pieces.”

The plates were soon served, and the dinner began auspiciously. Mrs. Erksen was now Argus-eyed and as sensitive to every glance or action as an undeveloped film. Her handiwork was being put through the fiery furnace and she intended to see how it stood the ordeal.

The first little bit she took of each thing, she tasted with a testing fastidiousness designed to ferret out flaws if any there were. But having tasted each thing, she became more complacent.

“I tell you now, in the war,” Hope Erksen went on, “a good meal were a rare thing. We et anything we could get, and were usually purty glad to get it.”

Far in advance of the others, Earl, with an un-

divided aim, cleaned off his plate, and shot hesitating but inquiring glances at his father.

"Earl, son, you——"

"You jest let him have all he wants," Mrs. Erksen interrupted, and being now most completely won to the young lad whom she had at first regarded indifferently, she filled his plate again with a generosity that made him forget and repent of his occasional outbursts at the fate that had made him a minister's son.

"Mrs. Erksen," Edith began in a low voice, "I do think your dinner is——"

"But occasionally, when we was in good territory, we fared better," said Hope Erksen meaningly, not having heard Edith.

His wife regarded him coldly, for his untimely interruption had checked what she had wanted very much to hear.

"——is so good," finished Edith, sweetly.

"I was a mite afraid the chicken would not be quite done," with the slightest lift of her voice as she hesitated.

"It was lovely. And your mixed pickles! I must find out how they are made."

"I made the receipt myself," she answered, proudly, "though I didn't think this jar was quite as good——"

"I don't see how it could have been better—everything was just perfect," Mrs. Morgenthal said.

"I say as anybody as cares enough to try can cook good victuals. There would be no need of all these cookin' schools if girls would stay to home and 'tend to their business."

Dinner over and all gathered in the living room,

there was a chance for more information-yielding conversation, and Mrs. Erksen, knowing what would be demanded of her in the future, resolved to make the most of it. But her husband, now that he had got started, so to speak, was determined to lay himself out.

"Funny thing happened when we was in camp down South," he began, rocking easily. "We was quartered in an old church, 'n cross the little gully as run by was a tollable-lookin' farm house. They was a girl lived there, 'n of an afternoon she would dress up 'n come out 'n set on the porch. 'N after she had set there a while she would git her umbrell' 'n walk down the road, twirlin' the umbrell' round and round.

"She wa'n't a bad-lookin' girl, littlish with a lot of black hair, 'n slim. The boys got to tryin' to git her attention, but they was afraid to go over, fear o' the old man. Stories had got out about us."

"Did you have a very long trip?" Mrs. Erksen asked, casting a reproving glance at her husband.

"We came from Arrowtown, where we spent the summer."

"Tolerable long trip."

"Yes, we started at six o'clock, and were on the cars all the time."

"You wa'n't preaching at Arrowtown?"

"No. We just spent the summer there. My husband was transferred here from the East."

Mrs. Erksen received this information in silence, knitting with deft fingers while she thought it over.

"'N as I was sayin', the boys got to tryin' to git her to come over, or else ax them over there. But they didn't go far. Discipline was purty strict. But there

was a feller in our company name of Arbuckle. Arbuckle was quite a lady's man. He was not backward like some of the boys, but got to actin' purty bold. One day he goes over where she was settin' on the porch——"

"And your goods are on the way?" Mrs. Erksen again interrupted, her eyes snapping.

"They have been shipped from the East. We expect them here now any time—although we are glad we can have such a good place to stay until they come."

"Well, he goes right over and speaks to her. She smiles at him 'n invites him up on the porch to set down. A lot of the boys was sore that they hadn't gone over before. We found out later that he told her he was the captain 'n boss of all us boys. He must, for she give him all privileges. But one day another feller went over 'n axed her might he take her for a walk.

"'I am to go with Captain Arbuckle,' she says.

"When he come back he was in an ugly mood.

"'Captain Arbuckle,' he jeers. 'Captain Arbuckle!'

"Some way it leaked out 'n the old captain heard of it. He was a little old crabbed man, 'n desprits proud of bein' captain. 'N he calls this young Arbuckle in."

"How do you like the looks of Paxton, what you have seen of it?" asked Mrs. Erksen, her needles flying.

"Beautiful! We are in love with it already."

"It be a fine taown, we think. We hope as how you like the parsonage."

"We know we shall. Where is it?"

"Daown to Elm Street. The committee says if they's anything you want done to it, jest say it."

"That is lovely of them. We surely will."

Here there was a little pause, and Hope Erksen seized it, leaning back slightly, fitting the rocker to his old back.

"He calls him in. 'You must tell her you are not the captain, and apologize fer deceivin' her,'" he commanded.

"That was goin' purty strong—'specially with a feller like young Arbuckle. 'I'll die first,' he says, or somethin' to that effect.

"But as it turned out, he didn't need to. It leaked out someway, 'n she got holt of it. Next day she was walkin' with another one of the boys, 'n wouldn't have nawthin to do with him again."

"Mebbe you would like to see the parsonage."

"Could we?"

"Sure. It be yourn now."

The four set out to look the parsonage over. Mrs. Erksen did not accompany them, excusing herself on the ground of household duties, while her husband slipped up to the attic, and easing himself into the old rocker by the window, lighted his pipe.

"Quite an old feller," he mused. "Must be. Naow, after all these years, things may turn out to my likin'."

The parsonage was a very old building. It occupied the center of a great lawn, so expansive as to suggest a small farm. And on this lawn was a miscellaneous orchard of old trees standing, some straight and flourishing, others gnarled and dying, and all in unexpected places.

Back by the old barn were cherry trees; behind the smokehouse were the quinces; while at either end of the old house, as well as in the front, were the apple trees. Of course there were maples.

In this broad lawn with its big old trees, the parsonage stood like some soft old homestead, mellow with the human experiences that its walls had witnessed. Thoughts came to Dr. Morgenthal as he beheld it—thoughts of what the years must have staged here. But above all a feeling of kinship came over him, a sense of unhurried hours, of long evenings when he could sit out and listen to sounds he loved; yes, a sense of gratitude warmed his old heart.

Mrs. Morgenthal walked a little faster and a little faster, until she went up the steps with the light feet of a girl.

"O, *such* an old house!" she exclaimed, entering.

There were four rooms down- and four upstairs, with a world of closet space; and each room in its turn was explored.

"This will be the study," he announced, standing with a soft light in his eyes, in a room that looked out on distant spaces.

"And my room is over here," Edith called.

"I love it!" Mrs. Morgenthal said, her eyes glowing.

"And not a thing to be done to it," he answered, relieved.

She shot a quick glance at him. They were downstairs again, standing in the big living room. She inspected its walls, then looked at him again.

"N-no, I suppose not," she said.

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"Is there something?" catching disappointment in her voice.

"If we could only have this room and our bedroom papered!"

"It seems to me this paper——"

"It's horrible, Billy. Simply horrible! Who in their right senses ever picked it, I can't understand."

"Of course, if you say so, we will have them papered."

Earl entered from the barn, carrying a broken hatchet and three eggs.

"Eggs out there," he announced, briefly.

"But you must take them back. They may belong to some of our neighbors!"

"But I found them in our barn!"

"Earl——" and obedient not to what his father said, but to the inflection of his voice, he took the eggs back.

While the parsonage was being inspected Sally Bay ran over to borrow a cup of flour from Mrs. Erksen.

"I see they ha' come," she began, promptly.

"They be here."

"He looks like he might be well on."

"But he knows something, Sally Bay!"

"Law, you don't say! What did he tell you?"

"I ain't sayin' everything as happened, but he knows, all right. Don't forget that."

Silence greeted this assertion. Indeed, Sally Bay seemed to have lost interest, turning as if to go back, the cup of flour in her hand.

"You hears the latest about Lilly and Vic Kline, I 'low."

Mrs. Erksen stopped beating the frosting for her cake, and looked her old neighbor in the eye.

"I don't get out much, with all this company," she answered, almost apologetically.

"No, I guess not. Their goods is not here yet, then?"

"Not yet. They be from the East, and it might take the things a long time to get here."

"From the East?"

"He was pastor of a big church over there, and transferred into this Conference. There wa'n't much time to talk——"

"She mailed a package at the Office," reverting again to Lilly Barbour and Victor. "It was a ring."

"A ring!"

"She's sending it back to him. She's spunky. I tells my Fred she won't pine around about Vic Kline!"

Then she fell silent, evidently meditating something else. "The girl looked pretty from where I see her," she said at last, referring to Edith Morgenthal.

"The girl is pretty. She reminds me of somebody, though I can't think who it be. Edith's her name."

"Did Hope take to 'em?"

"He did," her lips tightening.

Sally Bay arose.

"Come over, Mrs. Erksen."

"Come back, Sally Bay."

CHAPTER V

THE household goods came on Thursday. Dr. Morgenthal was overjoyed at their arrival, and engaged a man to bring them up at once. He was eager to get into the old parsonage and fix up his study.

The living room had been papered a light brown, the bedroom, a pale yellow that gave out a soft light; while the Ladies' Aid had gone over the whole house with meticulous care and got everything in order.

"Now, be sure to tell the drayman to take everything to the room where it belongs," Mrs. Morgenthal cautioned him.

But even at that, things were scattered promiscuously here and there, and in time there was the wildest confusion.

"First, we want to get the kitchen fitted up," the order went forth, directing all effort in that direction. "We must eat while we work."

And by a little after one a fire was going in the stove and preparations were being made for dinner. But there was a knock at the front door, causing Mrs. Morgenthal to look despairingly about, almost as if looking for a place to hide. But she nodded to Edith, who went to the door. It was Sally Bay.

"Don't mind me," she said, entering with a basket covered with a fresh white napkin. "You'll get used to me 'fore you've been here long. I tells my Fred

movin's not so bad when you have plenty of victuals. I ain't got much here, but I hope what is is fit to eat."

She lifted off the cloth and began arranging various articles on the kitchen table.

"You jest set down now and eat. I'll get things ready for you." And despite protestations, it was so.

With the four members of the family seated at the small kitchen table, she bustled about energetically, filling glasses with water, opening a jar of spiced pears and emptying the contents in a dish she had brought with her, urging, asking them to help themselves.

"Law, we be used to havin' ministers move in," she chattered. "Some of us takes them, most likely, but we always try to see they gets along."

"Used to be," she continued after a pause, "me and my Hallie and Fred was afraid of the preacher and his family. They was—o-o-o, so uppish! But we gets used to them and finds they be like any other folks. The minister's just human, after all."

To this remark Dr. Morgenthal voiced vigorous assent, as he had done on countless previous occasions, declaring that he never wanted anyone to feel ill at ease when he was around, but desired to be treated as any other man.

"We are all one, you know," he ended.

"Law, that's what I says. And now, when the minister comes to visit at our house, he can take things just as he finds them."

"Then I won't hesitate to come," he said.

"You be from the East?" as she filled his cup with coffee she had found on the stove.

"Yes, from the East. We have always thought we

should like to live out here where it is democratic, and now the pleasure is ours."

"You just has the two children?" She asked the question haltingly, as though afraid to be so bold, yet impelled by a curiosity that was too much for her.

"We had three. We lost a daughter last year."

"Law, now," and the mother in her now spoke, the mother whose heart was soft with love for her own. "That be too bad. You will excuse me for askin' you."

"You have a daughter, sister. You can understand," and these words were the beginning of that wonderful friendship, found nowhere else than in the ministry, born of mutual sympathy and understanding, which binds a pastor to his people.

"Was she older than——?"

"Two years older."

Impulsively she turned toward Mrs. Morgenthal, the essential motherhood of her nature prompting her; and as she looked into the misty brown eyes, her heart melted for what this woman had suffered.

"I hope we can make you like it here."

"You can!" and Mrs. Morgenthal put out her hand, understanding.

The afternoon found Dr. Morgenthal busily engaged. So great was the confusion that he gave up all attempt at systematic effort and fell on the first thing to hand, whether it happened to be a curtain-pole or a bed-railing, and carried it to its place. Mrs. Morgenthal found him straining at a box of books.

"See here, now. You must be careful. Remember this is Thursday, and there are only two more days until Sunday."

"But I want to get things straightened out a little."

"You know what it will mean if you are tired out on your first day. That is when they will be out to hear what you can do."

"That is right. That is right. I must save myself."

Truth to tell, in heart he was still uncertain whether he would suit the people. The lessons of the past few months had been too bitterly learned to leave him much confidence. He accordingly ceased all heavy work, though the disorder worried him, that he might have sufficient strength for Sunday.

When the day arrived, while outwardly he bore up with a hint of the old imperiousness, yet did he quake inwardly. As is true of the aging man who is conscious of being near a dead-line beyond which his ability should diminish, he did not know how near there he might be, whether, indeed, he might not already have passed beyond, and he feared others might have a way of detecting this fact better than he.

There is a peculiar stage in old age where reference ceases to be to self and comes to be to others; where the person, losing confidence in his own capacities, begins to trust less in his own judgment and more in the judgment of others. These others have passed sentence upon him; he vaguely feels he is out of touch with affairs and begins to take his attitude, in a manner peculiarly pathetic and wistful, from them.

So it was with Dr. Morgenthal that first Sunday morning. He shrank from the appraising eyes turned toward him as he sat in the pulpit, fearing that some might note his inward uncertainty; fearing, indeed, that he might manifest it outwardly.

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Hands gripping the pulpit to hide his nervousness, he announced the first hymn. When later he made the morning prayer, his very agitation gave his petition an added earnestness and sincerity that got wide response throughout the congregation.

Mrs. Morgenthal sat throughout the service, herself desperately nervous, trying to sense the attitude of the congregation, holding her breath when he paused for a word, praying inwardly that all might go well. But when it was over she did not know whether all had gone well or not.

He likewise was uncertain. Sally Bay, still warm with the bond of sympathy that ever after bound them, shook his hand and spoke encouragingly. Mrs. Erksen bowed stiffly and passed out with but a perfunctory greeting. It was her husband who gave the greatest amount of encouragement.

"Brother, jest keep that up, and I'm with you!"

Just that, but one sensed a sincerity behind the words that gave them force.

They were scarcely inside the old parsonage when he turned to her, searching her face anxiously, while she, understanding, was uncertain and distressed. Always it had been understood that she should be his faithful critic, and always she had striven to be, praising where she honestly thought praise should be given, but striving equally to be accurate in her estimate when praise could not be given.

"What did you think of it?" he now asked.

"Honestly, I don't know! The sermon was good; you made the points and your delivery was all right. But some way I wasn't able to sum up the effect of it."

"I wonder if it was because you had heard the sermon before?"

"N-no, I think not. The people here—I was not sure of their attitude. They are not just like the people we have known."

"Do you think they are disappointed that I am old?" He put the question as one who fears to hear the answer.

"I can't understand it!" She was clearly distressed. "At times they seem glad of it, and then—I don't know what they think."

"I will put more time on my sermons," he said, uncertainly.

Shortly after dinner he went up to the study and began work again on the sermon he had selected for the evening service. This was against his custom. It had been a rule with him to cease all work Saturday noon, so as to go to his services Sunday fresh to his task.

But she heard him walking the floor, back and to, back and to, muttering; and she understood that he was going over the whole sermon, word for word.

Edith came down from her room, looking vastly composed and peaceful.

"Well, how did you like the service?" her mother asked.

"I liked the Sunday school better," she exclaimed, gayly. "They had me teach the Old People's Class, and the fun I did have! That poor old man they call Guiraud was in it, and he kept pointing his finger at me and saying, 'But, mon cher, excuse. Allow me ze one question right here!' And there was a Mrs. West-

lake there with her husband. When I happened to ask her a question, she always said that she wa'n't sure, but it maught be this or it maught be that. And did you see that little old man named Ackers? He was forever waving his hands and shaking his head and saying it was all too deep for him. I just hope they ask you to teach the class next Sunday. It was the funniest thing I ever saw."

But it was evident that she did not find it very difficult to discover funny things. Laughter was never far from her full expressive lips; and when it dimpled them apart it pealed past her pearly teeth in a note as unaffected and contagious as the abandoned call of a bobwhite.

"I am going to love this old place!" she cried, impulsively. "It is wonderful." And as if to give vent to the insuppressible buoyancy within, she tripped down to the old barn to see the cherry trees.

And as if to confirm that she was indeed very woman, she began to think of the faces she had seen that day in church, faces of men. John Dexter: not so bad looking, but—— Then there was that one that sat back next the door. She had not met him, though he certainly was handsome.

"Want to go to the woods for a walk?" Earl asked, indolently, appearing as though from nowhere. And she had wanted just that.

"I do. O, I do!" she exclaimed. Then turning, "You scared me, Earl. What did you say?"

"Want to go to the woods?" he repeated in the colorless tone of the brother.

"N-no, I guess not," she answered this time. She

had wanted to—but Earl. If there were someone else——

The church was well filled at the evening service, every one, as usual, curious to hear the new minister. As for him, his sermon went off smoothly, save that to one who had known him in the early years of his ministry there seemed something strained and unnatural about it, as if he were making desperate and artificial effort to make it impressive.

And again, as usual, he questioned his wife as soon as they were in the house.

“What did you think of it to-night?”

This thing which they had taken to doing early in their married life as a sort of safeguard against his falling into ruts either in gesture or words, had then been carried out as a means of securing advancement. Her part in those days was not difficult; she merely pointed to an improvement which he could easily realize.

But to-day it appealed to her differently. It seemed a burden, even a cruelty. As he now stood uncertainly before her, waiting for her criticism, she wanted to evade him, to flee from his presence. Only the habit of years held her.

“It was all right,” she parried.

“But what did you not like?”

“I liked it, all right. Billy, you were nervous about it.”

“Did it show in my delivery?”

“Yes, it did.”

“I guess I was a little too anxious,” he reflected. Then more energetically, “Winnie, I don’t want them

to get to thinking they have a helpless old man here."

"You are not old, and you are not helpless," she cried, defensively. "The only thing—just be natural; and then if they like you, you will have nothing artificial to keep up."

The reception was scheduled to be in the church parlor Thursday evening. Dr. Morgenthal dressed with considerable care for the occasion, and was ready far in advance of the others—excepting Earl, who had fervently and defiantly declared he would not go.

When Mrs. Morgenthal had finished dressing she slipped across the hall to Edith's room to help her.

"Anything I can do, Pattie?" she asked with that air of suppressed excitement which somehow never fails to hover about a woman just before a social event.

"Is my hair all right?"

She revolved slowly before the mirror, herself carefully scrutinizing the heavy coils of dark-gold hair that were wound atop and to the back of her head. Her mother approached and with deft fingers made an alteration not noticeable to the unpracticed eye.

Then she placed her hand on her daughter's shoulder and turned her about slowly, her eyes taking in every detail: the hair, the slightly oval face with its smooth, dusk-tinted skin, the round neck with glimpse of soft breast; down from the satin girdle with its tiny rosebud trimming, that encircled her waist, to the soft maize taffeta under its draping of tulle.

"It is beautiful, Pattie! I am so glad you could get it!"

"Isn't it?" fairly glowing in her delight. "I never saw such a pretty thing."

And indeed as she descended the stairs for the inspection of her father, that was his inward comment, not only of the dress but of the girl as well.

Hope Erksen stood before Dr. Morgenthal in the receiving line, and with an ease born not alone of familiarity with every individual who entered, but as well of gentility running unbroken back over the generations, he introduced the new minister to those who had come to do him honor.

"And this," he was saying, "is Mr. Guiraud. You saw him at church Sunday. He is one of the faithful—and quite a checker player," he added with his chuckling laugh.

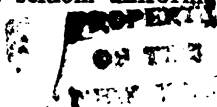
"I ask of you ze pardon," old Guiraud said. "But with ze sermon on Sunday I was very greatly impressed."

To have seen him, one would have little guessed his past. Even in the town there were conflicting stories about him. Some said he was an anarchist in hiding; or a scholar turned misanthrope and bitter with the world; or one addicted to drink who had lost his patrimony and was forced to live alone in Paxton.

The least that could be said was that he was distinctly unique. A little fleshy and not so very tall, with a graying Van Dyke beard and an eye with a peculiar though melancholy luster.

Even on slight acquaintance one was struck by his scholarship. In familiar manner he would refer to historical events of the far past, to his intimate life in foreign capitals, to the problems of adjustment of modern civilization.

His manner of speech was seldom uniform. Some-



times he spoke with strong dialect, then again his speech was naturally cast except for certain difficulties always encountered outside a mother tongue. No wonder Paxton was puzzled by him: here was mystery!

He stood now holding Dr. Morgenthal's hand and looking at him with reflective, brooding eyes, until the new minister wondered whether this man were to be taken seriously or with a measure of friendly tolerance.

"It is our hope," he continued, bowing slightly, "that you will like it here with us."

But when he shook hands with Edith, he paused to speak more fully. "Greatly indeed, mon cher, we enjoyed ze having you as our teacher. New minds, they instruct. Is it not so? Now that our teacher is gone, you may take the class for good. Do I have ze promise?"

"O, but I cannot. Who was your teacher before?"

"Ze wife of ze predecesseur, ze former minister. Mrs.—Mrs.——"

"Allen?"

"Allen. Ze same. But she is not here now, so we ask you."

"Thank you, Mr. Guiraud. But I am afraid the class would be altogether too much for me."

"Again I may speak about it. At another time." He was not willing to take refusal.

"Quite a thing to git him to talk as he did to you jest naow," Hope Erksen was saying to Dr. Morgenthal as the slightly pudgy figure of old Guiraud passed down the room.

"Is he——?"

"Brilliant old fellow. Lives alone daown over the hill. Don't half the people understand him. But that ain't his fault."

"I hope I may get better acquainted with him."

"You will, all right. But it means something to have him talk like he did to you jest naow. I never heard him do it before."

Suddenly Dr. Morgenthal felt the warm blood in his breast. These words, clearly intended as praise, drove away the anxiety and fear that had lurked there. He experienced a new delightful glow.

"I am glad," he said, simply. But he felt much more.

By this time the room was well filled, and many had found seats to await the beginning of the program.

"I guess it be abaout time to quit our places here 'n begin the program," Hope Erksen said.

But just at this point a young man entered whose manner and appearance were both so striking as to make his entrance an event. His very walk had a jerk of aggressiveness about it, and when he was introduced to Dr. Morgenthal he shook his hand with a grip that made the old man wince. The smile that accompanied his greeting revealed the flash of a gold crown.

"Knowles Carleton, one of our young men," Hope Erksen said.

He was tall, but so broad were his shoulders that one did not get an impression of height. The striking feature of his face, aside from the thick black hair that was combed smoothly back from his forehead, was his prominent aquiline nose that gave to his features

a rough, rugged appearance suggestive of pronounced virility.

"Mrs. Morgenthal? I am pleased to meet you," he said as he continued down the uneven line.

"My daughter," she said, introducing Edith.

"Well, a daughter!" He looked at her with such instant and open admiration that her eyes wavered. "Now, I am glad to meet you," he said meaningfully, a pronounced accent on the final word. "Not many of our preachers have daughters."

"This is an exception," she laughed, coloring in spite of herself.

"Some exceptions we like," his eyes still upon her.

His words, almost ill-mannered in their abruptness, and his unconditional manner, fairly beat against her, giving her the feeling that she should be utterly borne down and submerged if she did not in some manner assert herself.

In this encounter like was meeting like. Her own assertive disposition was encountering his, still more bold and masterful, and she felt a flare of quick antagonism at the same time she was thrilled indescribably.

"I wouldn't be too sure about it," she countered, lifting her chin slightly. "Some exceptions turn out badly too."

"Let us hope we have a chance to see." And again he twisted the situation until it had a personal slant that threw the burden back upon her.

What should she say? Rapidly she sought for answer, determined not to betray personal self-consciousness by taking him seriously, yet conscious of

an increasing effort in meeting his direct admiring eyes. Although standing slightly apart and wholly isolated in the general confusion, she yet felt stifled, oppressed.

"They are breaking up now for the program," Mrs. Morgenthal said, interrupting them.

Edith caught at the suggestion, quickly turning and following her mother to a place up front. Carleton made his way round back. As she partly turned to sit down Edith glanced back and caught his eyes following her. The blood rushed to her face as she seated herself. She wished she had not looked back! Would he think——

The program itself was in charge of John Dexter, the Sunday school superintendent. It was he whom Edith, having met at church the Sunday before, had remembered later.

Somewhat slender, with fair complexion and hair, he was nevertheless very alert and engaging. But there was about him a hint of boastfulness, a tendency to extravagance in speech, even a kind of assumed boldness that Edith learned to dislike almost at once.

It was instinctive with her, this subtle dislike. She was even annoyed at herself for feeling it. But she sensed affectation in his manner, his words; something put on, unnatural.

There was music, a reading. Dexter made some rather stereotyped remarks. But each item seemed intended only to point to the address of welcome which was to be given by Hope Erksen.

When he went up in front to speak he surveyed the audience with easy familiarity. It was apparent he

did not mean to be dignified, even in the present circumstances.

"Minds me of a time in the war," he began with his clownish smile. "We got a new officer over us, 'n atter we had had him quite a spell 'n found out we liked him fust rate, we give him a reception, tellin' him we was glad he had come among us. Our brother here," referring to Dr. Morgenthal, "has been with us a couple of weeks 'n we like him. So why not welcome him? One way this reception differs from others I have 'tended here in the last thirty years: They've sent us an old man. I ain't embarrassin' you, be I, by callin' you old? Men ain't like women. I wouldn't tell no woman that. Anyway, we've got you, 'n that's a change. We hope it turns out a good 'un."

Then he proceeded in his own peculiar fashion to outline his hopes for the church and to pledge to the new minister a united and faithful membership. And, as never fails when such words are spoken sincerely, the speech struck an undercurrent of deep feeling. The old speaker welcoming an old pastor, the congregation of all ages, all with a simple faith and a humble purpose.

Dr. Morgenthal's response was brief. Nor did it partake of the aggressive or the confident or the oratorical, as had the response of many younger pastors given in the same room. But there was a depth to it, a vast and sympathetic understanding. It was the voice of an old man speaking to his children. Truth to tell, he was enormously moved, and being moved himself, he touched the hearts of others.

The program finished, there was a return to informal

talk and gayety. A group surrounded Edith, composed quite generally of young men. Into it Knowles Carleton pushed his way, bringing with him a young girl—she was really eighteen, but her soft, quiet disposition made her seem even younger—whom he introduced as his sister.

"Margaret got in late," he explained, "and I wanted her to meet you."

The two girls had scarcely exchanged glances when, as is usual with opposites, they became fast friends. The soft, clinging girl had found complement in the independent one; while the latter had felt the stirring of that tendency of protection that made her slip her arm about the other girl and hug her.

The fact did not escape Knowles Carleton: he looked on with evident delight, smiling broadly and making no move to depart.

"If you are from the city, I suppose you don't know anything about the farm," he began.

"There he goes!" Margaret laughed, fondly. "He was just like any other normal man until he came back from the agricultural school, but now he is crazy over a farm. Do you know what a nodule on a leguminous plant is?" she asked, pretending aggravation.

"A nodule?"

"Here!" he interrupted. "That's what gets them going," he grinned broadly, "when I come round the house and call a pea pod a dehiscent legume."

"Listen to him. He may never stop now."

"But what is it all?" Edith asked, in pretty bewilderment.

"Scientific farming," he answered, promptly.

"It is calling a little baby potato a tubercle," Margaret contradicted gayly.

"Here she is," John Dexter, the Sunday school superintendent cried, seeing Edith. "I have been looking for you for seven hours. The Old People's Class say you must be their teacher."

"O, but I never could."

"Sure, it's easy," Carleton broke in. "All you have to do is to ask a question and then turn old Guiraud loose after it."

"But, honestly," in evident distress, "ought they not to have some older person?"

"It's all right," Dexter assured her with the eager-for-acceptance urge of the superintendent whose chief worry is to find teachers for the classes. "They will be tickled to death with you."

"Who wants me?"

"All of them! Mrs. Amiah Westlake has followed me around all evening wanting me to get you."

"If I were only sure——"

"It's all right. Don't worry. I'll put you down as the teacher and you will have a good time. You won't have more than forty of them at once," and he hurried away, lest this arrangement might be altered.

"Think of it!" she wailed. "Teacher of that class of old people. Honestly, they know the Bible so well," lowering her voice, "that I am afraid to mention anything about it."

"Sure. They've been going there and studying it for fifty or sixty years. Why shouldn't they know it. Just like going to school that long and studying the same book."

"But it is the Bible," she said with lifting brows. "What I meant was that I was afraid to teach them."

"I may join the class and help you out."

During the greater part of the evening Mrs. Erksen remained in the kitchen, an austere figure in blue dress and small apron, intent on seeing that the feature of the reception intrusted to her should go through with the severe and mechanical exactness which so delighted her.

Sally Bay, the other member of the Refreshment Committee, her sharp pinched features contrasting with the full composed countenance of Mrs. Erksen, was all activity, rattling the stove to hurry things up, counting, now the people in the parlor, now the dishes she had arranged on the table.

"I do hope we have enough to go around."

"We will have enough, Sally Bay."

"It must be about time to begin."

"It will be, shortly."

And shortly it was, and the one with a stately dignity, the other with the sharp energy of a bundle of nerves, served the guests who had come to the new minister's reception.

Edith and Margaret Carleton sat down together, with Knowles keeping them company. His big awkwardness was brought out sharply by the small plate with its cup and sandwiches, which he held firmly on his rigid knees.

It was not long after the dishes had been collected that Mrs. Carleton approached the little group.

"Well, children, I guess it is about time to go."

"Time to go? Well, I guess we will have to go then."

Nothing like a good boss. Good-by, Miss Morgenthal—until we meet again.”

The people went out, one after another, until but a few remained besides Dr. Morgenthal and his family.

“I suppose we had as well go now?”

“I think so.”

They had scarcely got out of hearing before he began to question her.

“What did you think of it?”

“It was a splendid evening.”

“Mother, do you know I believe they are glad they did not get a young man.”

“It did sound that way.”

“He never would have mentioned it openly if they hadn’t been.”

“Wouldn’t it be fine, Billy, if they were, and we could live on in this beautiful old place—just on and on?”

“Wouldn’t it?”

Edith went to her room and, lighting the lamp, surveyed herself in the glass. Again the maize taffeta gave out its soft luster from under the covering of tulle, and again she glowed with delight in possession.

“What was the silly thing?” she asked herself, absently. “A—a nodule?”

CHAPTER VI

THE month of October that year was one that the Morgenthals should never forget. Accustomed as they had been to life in the city, where the coming of frost meant an increased sharpness in the air that hinted of the approaching desolation of winter; where the impression of the impending season was heightened by the gray streets and bare brick walls; where the winds whirled the hard dust at leaf-drifting time, they were not prepared to anticipate this fall in Paxton.

For out here the coming of frost but serves to put the meerschaum in its case to give it a more perfect coloring: The hoarfrost touches the leaves and encases them for the night, only to be dispelled by the sun in the morning, leaving the foliage steaming from the contact, but colored a more beautiful crimson or amethyst or gold.

The village is set on a hill, from which mile after mile of the surrounding country may be seen. And mile after mile it is a receding panorama of loveliness. To the north, out beyond the four-corners, is the great tract of timber that shows mostly brown when viewed from town. To the west, there is the little creek far down in its basin—Carle creek, where the old water mill used to stand—and beyond it the big maple bush, where three thousand pails are set out at sap-running time. South and east, seen from the edge of the park, is a vast bottom country with little Morrow showing in the far distance.

When fall comes here the sun swings a little toward the south, and instead of beating down with such intense energy rather slants his beams in a way less vigorous and more lazy than in the summer. It is as if Apollo stops in his course to look at the world beneath him and breathe deeply.

And on these autumn days, with just enough elixir in the air to give zest to effort, the farmers from far and near hitched up and drove to town, traveling the ochre-colored roads with no particular haste, arriving in town and disposing of their produce with shrewd bargaining ability, purchasing sugar and salt and yarn and winter clothing with an unhurried inspection of each article, and driving home again in time to do up the chores.

The parsonage was not on the main street of town. It was over on Elm Street, a little to the north and east of the main part of town. But across from it was a great watering trough made from half of a huge hogshead, where spring water bubbled from its deep reservoir to fill the trough perpetually. And round by this trough many of the farmers drove to water their horses.

Each time a member of Dr. Morgenthal's congregation drove by that way, while his horses buried their noses in the clear water of the trough, he would sort a basket from his load and, crossing, knock at the parsonage door.

"Was just drivin' by, brother, drawin' some stuff in to taown, and thought you might want to see what kind of stuff we raise out on our farm."

It might be potatoes or onions or parsnips or cab-

bagas or rutabagas; it might be a can of maple syrup, or a jar of peas or berries or beets or peaches or pickles. Whatever it was, it was the finest thing the man's farm had to offer, and it was given, not with a sneer of superiority over one who thus accepted promiscuous charity, but with a respect and kindness seldom found elsewhere.

There is quite a little said in this day about the lack of pride in one who would permit himself thus to be made an object of charity; about the shame that ought to flush his face who receives gifts such as these. But those who rant this distortion either do not know whereof they speak, or else, embittered themselves, they resent a spirit of kindness anywhere, even as the choleric misanthrope, beholding an act of humanity, lifts his lip in hard, cynic sneer, hinting ulterior motive.

The gold and the frankincense and myrrh were not tossed into the manger by supercilious men who then turned away with tongues in cheeks, but were gifts of respect from the humble who wanted to do kindness and honor. It is our unfortunate commentary on our age that we have difficulty in believing that kindness might be an end in itself.

It was not long until the parsonage cellar began to give out an air of comfort, as if many drafts from its storehouse should be needed to deplete it. And this made Dr. Morgenthal feel secure: he had his home, he had his people, and he had his living!

But more to him than the security of abundance was the showing of kindness, which warmed his heart even as the encouraging word warms the heart of the man who has done his best.

He got to enjoying the place. Each morning he got to walking up to the Office to get his mail. And a big dog, with a sunny face and sociable disposition, which lived three doors up, came to understand this habit, and each morning would come out to the walk and wait for him, when, after licking his hand and jumping up on him, he would walk up town with him.

It came to be quite an event, this trip to the Office with the dog. Each morning they went up the street, past the little old house where Uncle Hi lived, past the other houses where women came out to shake their rugs and call to him a good-morning, up the street to the edge of the park, where the dog never failed to make a wide detour, coming back just as his companion reached the drugstore on the corner; going down to the Office, and finally back home.

On those occasions when Dr. Morgenthal sat on the porch to read the paper when he got back from the Office, the dog came up and lay at his feet the while, his head on his paws, his eyes on the paper. But when the Doctor went on in the house, the dog, too proud to go where he was not invited, trotted on up to his own home where he could go in and out at will!

One day as Dr. Morgenthal went up the street Uncle Hi called to him. He said little until they were down in the lot below the house, where he had quite a space fenced off for his chickens.

"You might not think chickens has any sense," he then began. "But they has sense—more than some people I know has. Did you ever hear o' namin' chickens?"

Dr. Morgenthal truthfully replied that he never had heard of naming chickens.

"Well, you hear of it now! Come here, beauties," he called softly.

The breed was of pure white Wyandottes, blooded and nurtured to suit the most fastidious fancier. The hens were small, with the soft feathers glistening brightly and hugging their bodies with perfect symmetry. They all came, the two cocks strutting forward with dignity.

"Can you tell 'em apart?" he asked, squatting and allowing them to clamber over him.

"I am afraid not."

"This one is Strutty," and she turned on hearing her name. "Do they know their names?" interpreting the questioning look. "Certainly! Come here, Strutty! See how she struts along, knowin' she's a bein' singled out!"

"I never heard of such a thing."

"There ain't nothin' I know of as won't know when you pet 'em."

He kept moving about among them, squatting now and then to allow them to approach him and jump up on his knees. And it really seemed as if she regarded him with genuine affection.

"See that one there? I call her Rosetta, 'cause she is proud and uppish, like a woman used to live down on South Street. She flung round mighty peert when others wanted to make up with her. You jest watch this chicken. Come, Rosetta," he called.

Rosetta came, but whether from disposition or because of some defect, she moved with a strained and

unnatural stateliness. Dr. Morgenthal laughed outright, and Uncle Hi joined him.

"Hwi, hwi," he chuckled in his funny way, "just old Rosetta over again."

From the street as he was leaving Dr. Morgenthal looked back, to see the old fellow squatting among his chickens, petting them and calling them by name.

He was out making some pastoral calls. Down Shady Lane he went from Uncle Hi's, turning in to see Mrs. Denny. She was a small woman with glittering black eyes and extremely nervous. She gave the impression of trying to look in all directions at once, sitting but for a moment, only to bounce up as some idea struck her. But for all her restlessness she did not seem to get so much done.

She glanced out the window as she hurried by, and seeing Dr. Morgenthal she stopped abruptly, clutching her hands on her breast and looking about with wild eyes.

"O, my laws! if there isn't the minister," and seizing what seemed to be a dust cloth which was lying on the baluster, she gave a hurried spat with it at a chair, only to hurry with it to the kitchen where she threw it into a closet. Then turning, she rushed back to answer the doorbell, making as she hurried a breathless attempt to rearrange her hair.

"This is Mrs. Denny, I believe?"

"Yes, yes. Come in, Doctor. I am so glad to see you." She had a way of rushing her words, bringing them out so rapidly that at times her sentences were hardly intelligible. "You are calling early. Do you know, I think ministers should call early, so much de-

pend on it. I sometimes say I don't care whether the minister calls here or not. We always like to have him, don't you know. But there are so many people that seem hurt if they are not called on that we always say we can wait."

She paused for breath, and in leisurely manner he prepared to answer her. But as if she were likely to fly to pieces should the slightest pause ensue, she hurried on:

"And how do you like Paxton? We think it is a lovely town. Not the conveniences of a city; but you can't expect that. We have lived here six years now, and have enjoyed it more every year. Ed, that is my husband—he has not been out to church since you came. He is night watchman and has to sleep day-times—says he never did like a town like he does this.

"One thing we miss here is the the-ay-ters, which we like very much. I hope you are not opposed to the-ay-ters, Doctor, as we like them so much. Many ministers are, but I think they do a lot of good—don't you know. I can't see that it is any worse to see the play than to read the books."

In time he got a chance to inquire where Mrs. Todi lived, and on learning that it was just next door, declared his intention of calling there.

"I am glad you are. Mrs. Todi is a quiet woman, and doesn't have much to say. She's not so regular at church, and sometimes the ministers don't call on her. She gets to thinking she is neglected. Not that she feels particularly hurt, but we all so want to be treated nice—don't you know."

He found Mrs. Todi somewhat unprepared for visi-

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tors. Her house was cluttered up by various articles of apparel; indeed, he found some difficulty in finding a seat. She regarded him with considerable reserve, and did not seem particularly concerned whether he found a seat or not.

"You have a very pleasant place here," as he seated himself at last in a straight chair by the wall.

"It is if you can find a place to set down," biting her words off. "I been ironing, and have things pretty well scattered about."

"I saw you at church Sunday."

"But I don't often get out," almost defiantly. "Sometimes I goes, then sometimes I stays at home."

Patiently he endeavored to make conversation, trying to get this taciturn woman to become sociable; trying to get her to admit external interests and not withdraw within herself and, brooding in there, become hard and embittered.

While he was talking there was a knock at the back door, and excusing herself with evident relief, she went to answer it. When she returned a moment later her face was flushed, and as he soon discovered, she was now vocal.

"A tramp," she snapped, shutting her lips thinly.

"Indeed! I hardly supposed there would be a tramp here."

"That's just because you don't know," she spoke vehemently, almost with an air of triumph. "There's tramps and tramps, and they be gettin' worse 'stead of better."

"One day me and Molly, my girl, be washin' in the kitchen. We was hurryin' to get through, expectin'

company right after dinner. All at once there was a knock at the kitchen door and I goes to answer it. A big tramp was standin' there.

"'Lady,' he says, 'can you give me a bite to eat?'"

"I didn't want to take time to wait on him, bein' rushed, but I goes and gets him a little suthin'. He et it and we hurried on. In a little while, I hears another knock and goes to the door. Another tramp!"

"'Lady,' he says, 'can you give me a cup of coffee?'"

"'No,' I says, and shuts the door in his face.

"I says to Molly, goin' back to work, 'Molly, they'd take the very shirt off your back.'"

She paused here, again shutting her lips thinly, lifting a lean thin fist and letting it fall with emphasis, knuckles white.

"Then we hadn't gone on much longer, hurryin' to git through, when I hears another knock, this time at the front door. I goes to answer it, and there stands another tramp!"

"'Lady,' he says, 'have you got any old underclothes you could give me?'"

"And I shuts the door in his face, not sayin' a word. 'It's just as I says,' I said to Molly, 'they'll take the very shirt off your back.'"

But sharp and unsocial though she inclined to be, the patient, gentle manner of Dr. Morgenthal in time disarmed her. It was not long before a new note crept into her voice; she softened perceptibly, and at last gave him a glimpse of her other self that few people ever were permitted to see.

"Spreng and I was married thirty-seven years ago," she was saying finally, her voice wholly different now.

"And, of course, like all young people, we had our plans. We was to buy this place, and in time add the three acres below it. I was to 'tend a big garden while he carpentered; and when we had it all paid for, we was goin' to truck-farm.

"But then when it was all about to turn out nice, the nail hit him in the eye. It goes to the other one sometimes, and he has to lay off. It's been pretty hard, but," sharply again, "we have made it, all right."

Thus she gave him a glimpse of the Thing that had pierced her; and never did physician of body with greater skill stanch physical pain, than this physician of the inward self, with personal diagnosis to guide him, attacked this cankering Thing and checked its sway.

He did not remain long, nor was she conscious that he had made an effort to help her. But when he went away a very kind spirit indeed possessed her.

Hardly had he turned the corner to go up toward the park than Mrs. Denny flew over the back way and through the back door without stopping to knock.

"O, my laws!" she began, tragically, "he just came in and found my house in awful shape."

"Mine was too. But—I don't care so much."

"What did you think of him?"

The mellow glow had not yet departed from her heart. She still lived in the delightfully peaceful atmosphere that contrasts so sharply with hardening tendency of bitterness.

"I like him the best of any minister we ever had."

"Do you know? that is what I thought. Him being an old man, I didn't mind half as much—finding my

house like that. It does make a difference. When Mr. Allen came to see me I was scared till I almost shook. I am not saying anything against him, you understand. He was a fine young man, but he was young and—and fancy! There was something about this man——”

“Always with the young ones it is git up and go! Make things move, lickety-sizzle!” And again she shut her lips thinly and lifted a lean fist in emphasis. “It’s your money or your service or your suthin’. Now, this old man,” her lips softening, “he didn’t try to stir us up.”

And it was not alone down Shady Lane that Dr. Morgenthal found favor. It was everywhere. The little hilltop town of Paxton had not become so drunken with the pace of competition for material supremacy that the spirit of humanity was scrapped to make room for business efficiency.

People here took time to live, to consider other values than the material—to value, that is to say, the feeling of humanity, to value kindness and sympathy as ends in themselves, and there was something about this humble old man with his unobtrusive benevolence that drew them to him in a spirit of great affection.

And he, feeling this, expanded in the genial atmosphere, each day adding to the spirit of gratitude that possessed him, making his smile more gentle and his willingness to serve this people more truly genuine.

CHAPTER VII

I AM not going to wait," Earl called, impatiently. "You get ready when you want to," and he walked indolently up the street.

Dr. Morgenthal sat in his study, the notes of his sermon before him, glancing over them with contracted brows and whispered comments, before going to the church, while up in Edith's room she and Mrs. Morgenthal were getting ready together.

"And I have not had time to glance over my lesson," Edith worried.

"I wouldn't worry, Pattie. With those old people you can get along by letting them do most of the talking," she said, comfortingly.

"But they sometimes ask technical questions, and then I must have a definite answer."

When they went below she picked up a Quarterly and glanced at the title of the lesson.

"The Divine Personality!" she gasped. "What in the world can I say about such a lesson as that?"

"One of the most delightful of topics," averred her father with complacent manner. "There is room there for some interesting comment."

"But what in the world could it be?"

"What could it be?" emphasizing the last word to denote his complete incredulity that one could ask such a question. "What is a person, and is God that?"

Man is body, mind, and soul. Is God also? Or is he pure spirit?" He fired the questions at her with mounting and aggressive enthusiasm, revealing that along these lines he had opinions.

They went down the steps and up the street. The big friendly dog was out waiting, and at sight of Dr. Morgenthal began to bounce around eagerly as if awaiting his signal that the daily walk should begin.

"Not to-day, not to-day, Speed," he said, but without conviction. "You must not go to-day."

But Speed sensed the lack of conviction and came to lick his hand. But when he attempted to put his paws up on the freshly brushed Prince Albert, conviction stole into the old man's voice.

The dog dropped and recoiled a step; then at the repeated and unmistakable warnings, he dropped to the ground where he lay in deep disappointment, puzzled and inquiring eyes following the beloved figure until it turned the corner.

"Good-morning, Uncle," for Uncle Hi was out back of the house. "How are the chickens this morning?"

"Fine, fine. I got some more to show you when you got time."

"All right! I'll stop in some day soon."

When they arrived at the church the usual Sunday school scholars were collecting. But one thing new caught Edith's gaze at once. Knowles Carleton was deeply engaged in conversation with old Mr. Ackers, up front where her class should be held.

This was the first time he had been to Sunday school, but her heart did not glow with gladness that the church might be building up. Her first thought was

both irreverent and irrelevant. It flashed through her mind that in a thoughtless moment she had put on the ugly little tubby hat that she hated, and that made her face look like a lima bean.

He remained in profound conversation with Mr. Ackers until the bell rang for the opening service, when he still kept his seat. Even when the classes were ordered to take their places for the study of the lesson, he leaned back innocently, as if with no thought of moving.

Edith approached her class with a numb horror settling over her. For intuitively she divined his intentions and was both vexed and horrified that they should be so. He greeted her coming with an ingenuous smile, then turned to Mr. Ackers.

"Is it all right for me to stay in your class? You don't object to my being with you?" and Mr. Ackers, going on the assumption that a person should be encouraged by the strongest possible welcome to attend the means of grace, instantly disclaimed any exclusiveness on the part of the class, and heartily welcomed the young man to a place in their midst.

"We may want you to help us out if we git in a tight place," he concluded.

But young Mr. Dexter, the superintendent, here approached and laid his hand upon Carleton's shoulder, bending over him as he sat in the pew.

"Guess we had better shift you back to the Junior Department. Been about eleven years since you were here, and I guess you have not read the Bible through more than seven times in that period."

"Does it mean I have to go to another class?" and

Carleton turned to Mr. Ackers as though seeking final confirmation of this very unwelcome and surprising proceeding.

And Mr. Ackers, feeling, when the matter was thus put up to him, that the salvation of this young man might depend on his being satisfied now that he had come to Sunday school, shook his head most decidedly and said that as far as he was concerned he saw no reason at all why a change should be made. He said, moreover, that he had had difficulty with the lesson for the morning, in his study of it during the week, and would like to have Brother Carleton stay and help the class out with it.

And in the end Carleton stayed with the class. Edith bit her lip in vexation, inwardly resolving that if she ever got through with the lesson that once, she would either resign as teacher without delay, or else never come to Sunday school again as long as she lived. She would explain to her father, and he could get her out of it some way. Or if he could not, it would mean the same thing. She did not purpose to go through with this again.

When she opened her Quarterly she beheld no familiar article to give her a lead in teaching the lesson. There were no marginal notations such as she sometimes made to suggest to her questions that might lead to fruitful discussions. The pages were foreign and unfamiliar; it was the first time for years that she had not studied the lesson.

She felt her heart pounding wildly, and the short moment that she sat there before the class trying to formulate a beginning that at least should denote a

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little familiarity with the lesson of the day seemed to her more like an age.

Then like a man blown off his feet by a whirlwind, who grasps at anything that has the appearance of stability, she recalled her father's questions of the morning, questions that had shown his profound knowledge of and interest in the subject.

She resolved to build up with them a wall of defense about her, if not by discussing them intelligently, then at least by asking them and throwing the class in confusion.

And in her benumbed state she thought it best to begin the discussion with an effort to determine whether the Divine Being has a material body or not. She asked the leading question with a fine show of ease and confidence; and hardly had it left her lips than old Guiraud held up his hand for attention. Indeed, he fairly bounced up in his seat, taking the lead like a spirited charger.

"Ze pardon I would ask of you," he began, his brooding eyes lighting with a sudden fiery eagerness to discuss this interesting interrogatory. "But does not ze Bible, it declare that God is ze Speerit and must be worshiped only as such?"

Edith nodded in confirmation of this unmistakable fact. There was no doubt about it; she had often heard her father preach from the text in question. And at her nod of confirmation he continued, becoming more and more enthused and positive as he proceeded.

"And, further, it say ze Divine Being was made flesh when he came into the world. Now, how could he have been made ze flesh if he had had a body before?"

This further reference simplified the whole situation for Edith, thoroughly convincing her that the Divine Being could not, in any possible way of thinking, have a material body.

But she did not want the whole subject dismissed in this summary fashion. She knew well that her supply of questions was limited, at best, and desired to continue the discussion of this one just as long as possible. The study period was thirty minutes; a furtive glance at the clock apprised her that scarcely five minutes of it had been taken.

Guiraud leaned back in his seat. To him the issue was a closed book. He even pursed his lips as if to imply that further discussion of the topic was a waste of time. But Edith turned to Mr. Ackers, who was studying his Quarterly desperately, evidently trying to find there an answer to this perplexing problem.

"What do you think of it, Mr. Ackers?"

Over his glasses he looked at her quickly, then down at his Quarterly and up again. Finding her eyes still on him and sensing that all were waiting for his answer, he became nervous.

"Me? O," shaking his head and waving his hands as if to disclaim all responsibility for any turn of affairs, "it's all too deep for me."

This was a disappointment. Interest did not seem to continue. She even searched her mind in an effort to remember another of the questions; a terror of being left without anything to say, before the end of the period, seized her.

"What do you think, Mrs. Westlake?" she asked

with an easy smile, wholly covering up her inward trepidation.

"I ben't very sure. It maught be this, or it maught be that. But I been a thinkin'. Don't it say in the Bible that God writ on a stone with his finger?"

Edith nodded in confirmation of this, recalling in a vague way that some such statement was made somewhere. Concerning the Ten Commandments, if she remembered rightly.

"And don't it say that he walked in the garden of Eden in the cool of the day?" She paused here, fixing a cold eye on old Guiraud. "And don't it say," she continued, aggressively, "that his ear ain't heavy?"

"Now!" All at once she snapped out the monosyllable like the crack of a whip. "How could he write with his finger if he ain't got none, or walk if he had no legs to walk on. Or how could he have an ear without no body to 'tach it to?"

As the horrible import of this relentless reasoning swept over her, Edith glanced despairingly at Knowles Carleton. He was leaning forward in his seat, a triumphant smile on his face. He also favored Mrs. Westlake with a nod of confirmation. And at this sign of support she became more pronounced in her manner, her eyes bickering with aggressive fire.

"And don't it say——"

But old Guiraud could hold in no longer.

"You will excuse ze—ze interruption. I repeat, ze divine essence has no body. How could he be here," tapping the seat with his finger, "and here," tapping in another place, "and here and here and here, if he has ze body. Ze body limits us in ze space, and——"

"I am jest a goin' by the Bible," Mrs. Westlake announced, calmly. "Don't it say that the eyes of the Lord be in every place? They be here," herself now tapping the seat, "and here and here. But what is an eye if it ain't an eye? Eyes as I know it are always put in a head!"

"That's right," Knowles Carleton nodded. His was the air of a man who has been convinced by facts, although the matter is somewhat difficult.

"Excuse, excuse," Guiraud interrupted, impatiently. "All that is what is called ze anthropomorphism, or a referring to ze Divine Being in terms of man. You understand?" He turned to Edith for agreement to this statement.

But at thought of taking sides and becoming involved in she knew not what difficulties, the old numbness came over her. "I think we might have further discussion. What do you think, Mr. Westlake?"

He drew his moustache between his teeth and pondered for a moment, eyes downcast. Then he lifted them to his wife. She was regarding him pointedly, her eyes still bickering.

"I—I don't feel competent to decide," he answered, lamely.

"I'd just like to ask," Carleton questioned, deliberately, "just what this anthropomorphism is?" He was looking directly at Edith.

She actually knew that her heart turned completely over twice. And a flame of resentment so intense and hot that had it been real fire it would have shriveled him flared up within her.

"Anthropomorphism," old Guiraud explained,

eagerly, "is where God is spoken of as if he had ze body and tendencies of ze man. And how else could a primitive people have him understood, save as he was spoken of in terms that they could understand?"

"Do you believe the Apostles' Creed?" Mrs. Westlake shot at him.

"Believe? Ze Apostles' Creed? Most certainement."

"Don't it say that Christ sets on the right hand of God the Father? Now how could he set there if there ain't no right hand!"

"But that is ze figure of speech!" His voice now rose shrilly, so great was his irritation. "When I call ze man a toad, I do not mean he is actually ze toad. I merely mean——"

"Toad or no toad," Mrs. Westlake broke in, coldly. "I says there can be no ear 'ithout a body to 'tach it to."

Edith felt the situation slipping away from her; felt more, that actual animus was developing. Head-long panic seized her. She wanted to get up, to run away where she should never see anyone again. There was a pounding in her ears, a mist before her eyes, through which she saw the lively countenance of Knowles Carleton with its broad smile. She wanted to reach over the seat and wring his neck.

And just then, to her unspeakable relief, the bell rang, the classes broke up noisily, and she found herself, the tension over, singing the closing hymn.

Carleton came to her after it was over, smiling with an open and engaging manner.

"What did I tell you?" he laughed as though they had a good secret between them. "All you have to do

is to get them stirred up, and you can sit back and watch the performance. I wouldn't have missed it for a colt. You did it fine!"

Thought of the cold agony through which she had just passed came over her, and these confidential words which he was now speaking struck her as sheer mockery. She remembered his question.

"I am glad you enjoyed it," she said, coldly.

"I sure did!" Then as he saw she regarded him with eyes that were hard, he stammered a little. For the first time it dawned on him what had been her actual feeling all the time. "You didn't—didn't—say! if you mean anything like that, I—I——"

"They are calling me to the choir," she interrupted, curtly, and went away, leaving him standing there.

Usually she sat in the choir with great unconcern, sweeping the congregation with unembarrassed glance. But to-day her usual aplomb had forsaken her; she sat in the eyes of the congregation with the miserable feeling that her own inward conflict was evident to all.

But the young man who regarded her with hastily stolen glances from the back of the church did not know her wretchedness. Its only manifestation to him was a deepening of the rich coloring of her cheeks, the warm blood flushing them with a beautiful vitality.

She opened her mouth to speak to his sister, who sat beside her, and he thrilled at the slight glimpse of her teeth as she turned her head. They were funny teeth, he thought—wide apart and tapering toward the crown: sharp little teeth.

It never occurred to him that the little tubby hat made her look like a lima bean. She looked saucy,

vivacious, he concluded eagerly, his mind accepting the thought with a certain suffused delight.

As for her, she declared hotly that never again would she speak to him. Her cheeks flamed vindictively as she formulated the resolve, and feeling the flush warming her face, she was vexed at herself that it was so—and immediately said to herself that, after all, he was nothing to her that she should resolve about him with respect to anything.

When the service was over she noted that he hesitated near the door, and stealing out through a side exit she hurried away, letting him go disconsolately home without an opportunity to speak the words he had decided upon.

"I am quite a fool," he said to himself in quiet conviction.

"I hate him," she told herself, reaching home.

"Brother," Hope Erksen said as he prepared to leave the auditorium, "your preachin' does me good."

"I am glad to hear that," heart beating faster.

"The kind o' preachin' we've had fer the last few years," he continued, "makes you think you be worth nawthin', 'n that the other feller is the one as deserves everything. You seem to figure that we be worth helpin'."

"True preaching ought to bring God to the people."

"But they ha' been sayin' it's the other feller as needs everything, 'n we ought to serve him."

"But what does he do?"

"Seems he don't ha' to do nawthin'," chuckling until his little moustache danced.

The Doctor thought over this as he went home.

Closing the parsonage door behind him, he saw his wife standing looking out back, toward the distant bottom lands.

"What did you think of it?"

"It was perfect," turning with conviction. "And the people were just carried away!"

His old face lighted up with such a great joy that she turned her head away. "Did you hear anything?" he asked, his voice vibrant with his great happiness.

"They said it was the best thing they ever heard," proudly.

"Mother, mother!" going to her and putting his arm about her.

Thus they stood, his arm about her, she leaning lightly against him, looking out back toward the far bottoms. Away down there was the creek basin . . . and some cows. . . .

"That there could be such a place!" she whispered, softly.

CHAPTER VIII

MRS. ERKSEN, carrying a basket containing many socks and stockings and a pair of frayed gloves, together with her darning needles and yarn, pulled the rocker over to the bay and sat down.

Her face wore a serene look, for although she had much mending before her now that it was getting cold weather, she had so far that day done her work exactly as she had planned it. She had got the washing out on the line by eight o'clock, she had scrubbed the kitchen floor with the suds she had left, and polished the stove while the fire was low.

This was precisely as she had planned it should be, before she went to sleep last night; and now she picked her mending from the basket with the fine inward glow of one who feels that she has accomplished all that she should, and has done it well.

She had little more than started her mending when she glanced out of the window to behold Sally Bay coming with her usual nervous haste. With a quick glance about the room she awaited her coming in peace.

"Just thought I'd drop in a minute," herself shooting lightning glances about the room. "I tells my Fred it's been a long time since I see a lot of my neighbors. You still mendin'?"

"I just be starting. Hope wears out his socks more'n he used to, seems to me. Did you wash this morning?"

"Law, yes, and a big one too. I says to Hallie, I says, 'We get things dirtier faster'n anybody I know.' Took till close nine to get it on the line."

Mrs. Erksen reflected on this last statement with a slight quickening of her fingers and a heightening of the inward glow. She had hers on the line by eight. She set her lips.

"Goes Uncle Hi to the car," she observed a moment later, looking out.

"He goes to meet 'em all."

"All. Ain't missed for a long time, 'cept the early and late ones. Tends his chickens then."

"They's more like his children, I says. He thinks more of 'em than lots of people does of their children."

"Calls 'em his beauties."

"They is pretty," Sally agreed, grudgingly. "But law, ain't no use to be a fool about 'em."

But here she ceased speaking and sat for some time in silence, rocking mysteriously. It was the invariable sign of news; and Mrs. Erksen bided her time.

"Funny things happens in this world," she observed finally.

"They do, Sally Bay."

"If I was Vic Kline's parents, I wouldn't have much peace. But as I says, some people raises their children so they won't have no sense. None of mine has growed up that way."

"Vic Kline don't, that's sure."

"You heard about it?"

"Guess it's the same. What did you hear?"

"My Hallie goes right on with the shower, and as Lilly was to be at our house for supper, I tells Fred

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if any mail comes for her to bring it down to the house. There was a letter." In the same tone one telling of an operation for appendicitis might have concluded, "But it proved fatal."

"Yes, there was a letter. Fred gives it to me so I could hand it to her. I see by the postmark it was from him. I handed it to her just as she was goin' upstairs.

"When she stays up longer'n I thought she ought, I goes up and knocks. She opens the door for me, and her eyes was red." And again she burst out vehemently: "I don't care! It's a dirty shame. That Vic Kline ought to be made to suffer for it!"

"Did the shower go right on?"

"You bet it did! And she never once let on."

"But how will it turn out?" Mrs. Erksen asked with no little anxiety. "Folks has got to know some time."

"Time enough," Sally replied, enigmatically.

Here the conversation languished. Both women were busied with their own thoughts, straightening out this tangle, which was the most absorbing of its kind Paxton had known for many days, to their separate likings.

Upstairs in his attic Hope Erksen sat in the easy chair by the window. He had come up not long after dinner, thinking to doze for a half hour or so before going up for the mail. But after he had lighted his pipe he got to thinking and forgot to take his nap.

He now sat looking out, watching the dog across the way. It had grown considerably in the past few months, and was now quite a sizable dog. But its

naive attitude toward life revealed that it was still a pup in experience.

Even as Hope Erksen's eyes followed it, it again caught sight of its tail and, as usual, was filled with curiosity. As on previous occasions, it started after it, going round and round. Becoming desperate at the way the thing evaded it, it sat down, as if hoping to pinion this wayward member and pounce upon it. But without success.

As ever, when he viewed this spectacle, Hope Erksen chuckled to himself; and, as ever, it must have started the same train of thought, for he made his invariable comment:

"Reminds me o' some people."

Then he got up and went downstairs. Sally Bay was gone, and he spoke to his wife rather hurriedly, as if anticipating opposition.

"Guiraud'll be down to-night," he said.

"Guiraud! Again?"

"'N the minister'll be comin' too, mebbe."

"The minister! Hope Erksen, you don't mean you be thinkin' of takin' the minister up there?"

"'N why not? Ain't it good enough?"

"The dirt! You won't let me clean it up! What would Sister Morgenthal say if he went home and told her? And them from the East!"

"Don't you worry. He won't see it," and so saying, he went up to get the mail.

Hardly had he left the house when she sprang up and put her mending aside. Hastily she procured broom and dust pan and hurried up the stairs.

When she entered the big attic room she gave a deep

sigh of despair. All was easy abandoned chaos. Chairs faced every way; tables were littered; floor was covered with every conceivable object. He had even whittled something with his knife, for fine whittlings were on the floor near the window.

"To think of it!" she gasped. "To bring him up here! I don't care for old Guiraud. But the minister! from the East!"

Her whole being fairly ached to put up the windows, clear out everything, and give the room such a cleaning-out as should leave no cranny untouched and no article undusted. But she knew better. Like many women who rule in their own household, she ruled only so far. She realized that in certain matters final decision was made by her husband; and she knew that on this one thing he was rock.

"The house is mine," he had told her quietly one day when, going into his attic he had found it swept and garnished until he feared to be at ease. "'Pears to me like it is. 'N you can have all the rest of the house, but you will keep out o' that room."

It was not so much what he said. It was the quiet manner in which he said it—not lifting his voice or stopping to give reasons, but delivering an ultimatum the neglect of which, to his mind, was evidently unthinkable.

Once a quarter or something like that, he took the broom upstairs, and she could hear him floundering about impatiently, thwacking at this or that, raising a cloud of dust, and coming down in a half hour or so, moist and dusty but satisfied.

But now she picked up magazines and papers, went

over the floor as best she could with the broom, and put the litter down again. She dusted the furniture, arranging it as best she might, without making the alterations too noticeable. She sighed, even when she had finished, but departed with a shake of the head.

About dusk old Guiraud arrived, and at once made his way upstairs. A little later Dr. Morgenthal knocked, and was shown up by Mrs. Erksen, who ached to apologize, but who knew that apologies for one's own household were not allowed.

Dr. Morgenthal did not notice that the room was in disorder. He did not consider that the papers and magazines on the floor were misplaced. He only observed that the big lamp with the white shade threw over the room a mellow radiance, and that near the table were some easy old chairs.

"We are glad to have you with us," Hope Erksen said in welcome. "Used to be four of us, then us two. But we be expectin' a third one, naow."

Dr. Morgenthal settled in an old rocker, and stretching his legs out comfortably, felt that indeed he should like to be privileged to this fellowship.

A stove, yellow with rust, was in the corner of the room, and behind it was considerable wood—chunks of beach and maple and hickory, which had been cut by a buzz saw. The stove gave out a pleasant but not intense heat, for it was November and not particularly cold, just chilly and sharp.

"This be your first time with us," Hope Erksen continued, leisurely. "Th' ain't nawthin' special about our meetin's. We jest come 'n talk. Women ain't the only ones as like to talk, so we come here where

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we got plenty o' time to do it. A man comes here 'n says what he thinks, 'n takes his time a doin' it." He chuckled at this.

As he ceased speaking a feeling of the essential peace of such a leisurely, unhurried attitude stole over the old minister. Here in this old room, with its mellow light and pleasant heat from the chunks burning in the yellow stove, men might indeed say what they thought and take their time in doing it.

He leaned back more comfortably.

"You been to the city to-day. My wife says she see you gittin' on the car."

"I have." The minister sighed.

"Tell us," old Guiraud requested with his quick interest, "what you think of ze city—of all cities."

The question so fell in with what had been Dr. Morgenthal's own meditations as he came home on the car that he was almost startled.

"You mean——?"

"What you think of it. Ze life, ze—ze tumulte."

"I have been thinking of that all afternoon. You say one says what he thinks here?" with a smile in the direction of Hope Erksen.

"Or nawthin'," was the answer.

"I have thought three things about the city," the minister continued, attesting to the habit of years of dividing his sermons into three parts. "First, the machine; then the speed; and finally the scrap heap.

"In the city, brothers—in the offices and mills and stores and factories—we have just a big machine made out of flesh and blood instead of wood and iron. A machine: exact subordination, specialization, coordi-

nation. There is no feeling; no exceptions are made, no allowances. Just machine accuracy, and all as cold as a steel billet.

"And what is the purpose of the machine of flesh and blood? Speed, that is it. Speed. Increase the output, double the production, speed up deliveries. Eliminate time, annihilate space—speed!

"The result is the scrap heap. As soon as a man's fingers tremble so he cannot write as rapidly as a younger man, scrap him; when a woman begs allowance for qualities inseparable from her sex, scrap her. The scrap heap of this human machine is made up of old men and worn-out women."

"It be," Hope Erksen agreed. For had he not lived and seen? "In young blood they's speed; in old, wisdom. So we throw out the wisdom to git the speed. Nowadays that's the word."

There was silence for a period, such as is likely to be the case when there is no haste to get all said on record time. Likewise, when each shall get a chance to speak, there is a tendency to consider well and speak accurately.

"Doctor, do you know more to-day than you did when you was nineteen?" Hope Erksen asked, irrelevantly.

"I do."

"Think you could give better advice now than then?"

"I know it," was the positive reply.

"'N you think a man 'ud git better advice and counsel from you now than he would ha' then?"

"There is no doubt about it."

"'N therein we see the folly o' the present day: we

are lettin' the speed o' nineteen, 'stead o' the wisdom o' sixty, run the world."

"It is ze civilization," old Guiraud contributed, reflectively. "And what is civilization? It is material. It is to have ze bathtub, and telephone, and electric lights. And to procure these we speed up so as to make more. And to have more time for ze speeding, we are forgetting: we are gaining ze world, but losing our souls."

"You think civilization might not be——?"

"It is—what you say?—ze change. It is switching about and seeking means as ends. Understand me: A man gets a beeg house. Why? He fills it with ze beautiful things. Why? He invites people in that they may see his beautiful house and ze pretty things. And why? Why? So he will be happy. But he is wrong. He does not understand. He has not had time to think ze thing out. For in all this, what part of himself have he gratified? Pride, that is ze first part, and ze second is his love of ease. And yet he has done that in order to be happy! He does not know that when ze happiness come is when love and sympathie come in and beautify ze inward life."

"Mebbe," Hope Erksen continued with the tendency of the masculine mind to finish what it starts to say, "mebbe they be some places where young fellers should lead. But to put 'em everywhere be to rob the world o' the benefits o' the greatest schoolin' they be—what a man learns from his own experience."

"The machine, the speed, and the scrap heap," Dr. Morgenthal summarized, slowly.

"You will excuse me this reference. I ask it. But

I have lived in Paris, I have lived in London, I have lived in New York. And in all these places men are seeking ze conveniences of civilization, and civilization is essentially material. Civilization thinks ze man lives by bread alone, by conveniences, improvements. It seeks after luxuries, ease, ze conveniences of life, and thinks these things will make men happy. But man lives inwardly, in his speerit, and these things do not satisfy ze deeper—ze soul. Then I came to Paxton, a leetle town, ze beautiful leetle place out of ze main current, where ze people live not in ze outward forms but in ze inward parts. They don't have so much ze money; they don't need it. They take their time; for why should one hurry when ze others do not? And it was then that I get my bearings. I have time to think out the things of life, that man like God is ze speerit, and must find his satisfaction in ze inward parts. You are fortunate to come here, Doctor."

"I believe it," the old minister exclaimed, fervently. And warmed by this new philosophy of life, he forgot his restraint and told these two men, old like himself, what he had never told any man before: The tragedy of his own old age and how it had come about—and of the death of his daughter.

For long after he ceased speaking there was silence in the room. Hope Erksen puffed reflectively at his pipe; old Guiraud, head on breast, drummed meditatively on his knees with his pudgy fingers.

The light of the lamp was still mellow; the warmth of the wood burning in the old stove made the room soft and pleasant. The chairs were easy . . . old. . . .

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As the silence lasted, Dr. Morgenthal was rather nervous. Almost he wished he had not spoken. Would this knowledge that he had been refused a return call to a previous church lessen his prestige in the sight of these men? Would it have been better to let them continue to think him a man who had known only victory?

Two things did not occur to him: the keenness of the insight of these two men, and the appeal of the virile man who admits his weakness.

"Naow, naow! They be throwin' away the wisdom o' sixty, for the speed o' nineteen."

"We live not by bread alone—here!"

And all at once the unspoken sympathy of these two old men who sat near him, made itself felt, and his heart swelled with it until it was nigh to bursting.

"Thank God! O, thank God!" he murmured.

CHAPTER IX

FOR many weeks after arrival in Paxton, Dr. and Mrs. Morgenthal thought it very unsightly and primitive that the people in building their houses had uniformly made the woodhouse an extension of the kitchen.

"Why these people build the coalhouse to the kitchen I cannot understand," she said on more than one occasion.

"Just an old custom that somehow got started, and I guess it has never occurred to anyone to stop it."

"I should think the very looks of the thing would stop it. The little 'L' runs back and spoils the appearance of the whole house."

"People are mighty slow about changing customs—in architecture as well as in anything else."

The woodhouse of the old parsonage was quite a step from the back porch, and it pleased Dr. Morgenthal that it was so. He had five cords of wood delivered, not so much because he intended to depend on wood as because he wanted to burn it for the novelty of the thing. His reliance for cold weather was placed in the coal that filled a compartment of the woodhouse.

"The old stove will keep us warm all right," he commented. "I guess we never used a stove before to heat the house. But new things make life worth living."

But while the stove, with careful and constant atten-

tion, did keep the house warm, winter had not gone far until he was willing to retract any statements he had made about the provincialism of attaching the woodhouse to the kitchen.

"It would not be so bad, really," he said with an air of wishing to be fair, "to have the woodhouse a little nearer."

"I guess the people knew what they were about, after all."

"No doubt about it," vigorously now.

As the snow piled up day after day, this conviction deepened within him. The climax came when, having forgotten to bring in either wood or coal for the morning fires, he was forced in arctics and bathrobe to wade out through the snow to the woodhouse.

"I think," he commented on his return, with a certain measure of constraint, "we shall arrange matters differently next year."

The snow did not bother Earl. He waded through it to school each morning, and at home poked about in the drifts with attitude as near genuine enthusiasm as he usually manifested.

It did not bother, it actually delighted Edith. She tripped about, half running to keep warm, each graceful step revealing the supple lines of her body, and getting a fine measure of enjoyment out of the situation.

And it may be that not least among her occasions for delight was a perfectly becoming brown coat, fur-collared in a manner exactly suiting, a coat which she had found almost too heavy the previous winter, but which now was exactly the thing.

Wearing this coat one afternoon two weeks before Christmas, with the snow flying in a perfect flurry about her, now falling on her cheeks and leaving them moist over the pink, now whisking her skirt to reveal the shapely high shoes, which were another source of her joy in the winter, she went up town to get the mail—relieving her father while the weather was bad.

She stopped and allowed the big dog to jump up on her, and then she got his head in her arms and hugged him, greatly to his delight, which he manifested when she released him, by jumping up and down and growling in a delirium of gladness.

"Speed is a fine dog," she told him, and he barked back a compliment equally fulsome.

"It doesn't take that dog more than five years to find out who his friends are," and turning, she saw John Dexter coming toward her.

He was not a large man. Coming toward her, he looked really slight of build. Neither was he exactly impressive. His face was thin, and the abundant light hair of his head shaded back from it in almost unbroken color.

But there was about the corners of his mouth on rare occasions the hint of a sneer, as if his insight into life was deeper than he allowed one to think. But his words seldom revealed it.

"But isn't he a fine dog, though!"

"About like forty-seven others in this town, more or less."

"You don't like him?"

"See whether he thinks so," and with a snap of the

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finger he called the dog to him, and it came with many and violent expressions of regard.

"How wonderful the snow is!" she exclaimed, as they walked up the street together. "Do you love the snow as much as I do?"

"That all depends on how well you like it. I can't say I am tickled to death with it."

She scooped up a handful of it, touching her lips to it before scattering it as a sower. Then she blew the flakes away that stuck to her lips, in a pretty little pucker.

"Not a speck of dirt on it, right here in town. As white as snow," laughing at her own tautology.

"There is nothing in this town to blacken it up!" Then more easily, "Six or eight feet of it is enough to make you white as snow."

"Does it really get so deep?"

"More or less," he qualified, shamefacedly.

"I have heard it gets terribly deep. O, I wish it would! Just think of being snowbound right at home. Wouldn't it be splendid!" and she actually danced in anticipation of the novelty.

"You wait before you say too much. I'd feel better if I could have my head out, at least."

"Think of sleighing with the bells jingling! It reminds me of Norway—what I have read about Norway."

"With the snow ten feet deep?" Then after she had made a grimace of protest, "But I am in on the sleighing. Get a horse that can clip off about forty miles an hour, and it's some sport!"

At the corner near the park they separated, he go-

ing on down Park Street, she turning up to the Office. Getting the mail, she went home in a fine glow of life.

Dr. Morgenthal was carrying in wood when she got home.

"To think of burning wood in this day! I thought all the wood in this country had been burned up long ago."

He carried a heavy beech chunk in to the living-room stove. It was a cut that had not needed splitting, being small enough to go in the stove whole. It was beautifully round, and the color of old silver. Opening the stove door, he slid it in with quick effort.

Edith stood behind him as he did so. She saw it slip in on to the glowing coals of fire; saw the flames leap up at it; catch hold of it and lick wickedly about it. Then the stove door was shut to and latched, locking the chunk in with the hot fire.

She recoiled a step, hands clenched. The blood left her face, leaving it white and strained. She stood thus for an instant, struggling with herself, shuddering. Then recovering partly, she glanced at her mother with a faint little smile.

"Isn't it foolish!" she ejaculated, trying to speak naturally.

"Edith! I don't see why——"

"But I do. I do! Every time I see that wood go in there and the little tongues of flame leap up and sear it! And when the door shuts and it is locked in there with that fire! Muddy, it just seems it calls to me to get it out—before it is smothered!"

"But it is foolish, Pattie. The wood has no feeling, and you know it as well as I do."

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"I know it—b-but just think of having the door shut and latched on the outside so there is no chance of getting out, and the fire——"

"Don't think any more about it. Sit down and tell me what you saw up town."

It was a little more than an hour afterward that a smart cutter drew up in front of the house, and the rather fustian voice of John Dexter called out in hello. Edith, glancing out and seeing who it was, went to answer.

"Have to go out the north road a few miles, and thought you might want to go along. Coming right back."

"Just a minute. I'll see," and she turned back to her mother, a look half vexation, half despair, on her face. "It is John Dexter, wanting me to go with him in his sleigh," she explained, tensely.

"Well, go with him," almost reprovingly. "It won't hurt you."

She stood for a moment undecided, doorknob in hand, looking about her just a little wildly; then with the short laugh of one who is willing to try anything once she opened the door and consented.

Completely bundled up, until little but the pink of her cheeks and the tip of her straight firm nose showed of her loveliness, she walked down to the cutter and got in. He held the robes up for her, and when she was seated tucked her in with care.

"The wind out these roads sometimes makes you think it is about leventy-leven below zero. I don't want you to freeze."

She hardly knew how to answer him. Indeed, it

was hard for her to make up her mind about this man. He was a gentleman, that much was undeniable. But he affected her unpleasantly.

Sometimes it seemed as if his real nature were covered up under a veneer of assumed boldness. His very tone was bombastic, his sentences exaggerations. And the occasional impressions she got of something deeper in his nature could not counterbalance her dislike of these things.

Part of her reluctance to accompany him this afternoon had sprung from a vague desire not to be seen in his company. It would look as if she—she considered him too seriously.

And yet underneath the veneer was something that appealed. It was noticeable in his eyes now and then, a look of humility, perhaps, or of uncertainty despite his boastfulness.

She was seeing much of him. His home was on the same street with the parsonage, but a little way up, and she often saw him there as she passed. And in an unobtrusive way he often sought her out in Sunday school, ostensibly as the superintendent. But had she been mistaken? Did not her intuition tell her there was more than mere professional interest in his solicitude for herself and her class?

But ever there was this subtle dislike. It was present now as she sat in the sleigh beside him. She fought against it, but it would not be put down.

But, after all, she was going out with him. And the day, was it not beautiful? Why remember? Why not enjoy the wonderful exhilaration of the cold winds and of the smoothly gliding motion?

"I won't mind it a bit," she flashed at him with a bright smile, now thoroughly recovered and healthily anticipant. As she smiled at him his eyes caught the flash of her white teeth, set far apart and tapering toward the crown.

"This horse is not a racer," he explained, looking quickly away. "A mile a minute is about all he can do. But he will get us there."

They turned up the hill, then down, the cutter gliding over the street toward the car line and past Mrs. Erksen's bay. That lady sat within, comfortably warmed by the big stove, knitting and keeping watch.

She looked out as the cutter swung down the street, and her head gave a just-perceptible jerk as she recognized the occupants. But, seeing with her own eyes, she believed, and after a time she spoke her thoughts.

"That's all right," she said, approvingly. "Worse things might happen. John Dexter's not the blow some thinks him. They be goin' out by Hassie's four corners, then turn down and go up by the big sugar bush and back the bottom road. Take 'em about two hours."

She knitted slowly, reflecting, almost pausing in her work, while her mind evidently strayed both from the work in hand and the couple rapidly disappearing in the smart cutter. She touched the curtains lightly, and got a final view as they glided out of sight. Then she sighed.

"Sleigh-riding is—nice," her eyes meditative. Then she sighed again and started to knit more rapidly.

Dexter, holding the lines taut, but giving the gray

sufficient bit to allow him to try his gait, sat in the cutter with his eyes straight ahead. And as the gray bounded along with the bells keeping a jingling accompaniment, the smart little cutter slipped over the white snow, leaving but two thin cream-colored ribbons behind it to mark its passage.

"The old horse may have a white-oak leg, but he can get over the ground in spite of it."

"Doesn't it slip along?"

"It had better 'slip.' The next thing to that is to 'turn,' and if it turns with us, we will wish we were in Florida."

"You mean it might turn over?" and he was not sure whether the question was asked nervously or eagerly.

"Over—or up on its side."

"I do hope——"

"O, never pull yourself out of a drift before you get into one," guessing that she spoke nervously.

The fields were as if a hand had been drawn over them, smoothing them, filling the depressions and leveling the projections, leaving the whole face of the earth one smooth, white silence.

The maples here and there had shaken the snow, and stood out black and tangled against the white background. Here and there the roadbed went through a cut, and many such places were level with snow, the road veering off through the fields.

"I sometimes think when I go through country like this," he said, quietly, his voice strikingly free from the usual fustian bombast, "that there might be a great artist ruling this world, who sometimes changes

the scenery to see whether it could be more magnificent another way."

She fairly caught her breath with surprise, glancing at him quickly to see whether he were serious, whether he understood what he was saying. But he was regarding the gray evenly, absorbed in his task. So she decided.

"Wope! Nearly went over that time. Given three feet more rise on my side, more or less, and we would be digging ourselves out now."

The road turned at right angles. They had, as Mrs. Erksen predicted, reached Hassie's corners, and were turning to the left to go down a way, then up and back the bottom road.

But it was soon manifest that the going on this road was not what it had been on the other. The drifts were not broken up. A team had been through, but the day before, and there had been drifting during the night.

The deeper snow annoyed the gray. His gait was quicker, more nervous, as his eagerness increased to get clear of this annoying thing that impeded his step.

He flung himself higher in the air, and came down with a wide bounding step. And in thus coming down, the string of bells that encircled him jangled more insistently. The sound seemed to frighten him, and it was as if he were jumping to get away from it.

His nostrils widened, the breath issuing from them in a sharp white cloud. He picked up a little more. The lines which Dexter now held were more than taut, but they were ineffective.

He lowered his head, the bit clamped tightly in his

teeth. He shook his head nervously from side to side, the while the balls of his eyes began to show white.

"Whoa, boy," Dexter spoke, soothingly. "A-o-o-oh. Whoa, boy."

"Is there——"

"Sit still," he commanded, quietly.

The cutter responded to each wild movement of the gray, throwing the snow in a white flurry from its course. Once it dipped perilously at a depression, but righted itself almost at once and went singing onward.

The snow deepened. The gray stumbled, fell almost to his knees, and came near buckling over on himself so sudden was the stop. But he recovered himself and again plunged forward, now more frightened than ever. Again he attempted to lower his head, but the lines were now ribbons of steel.

One thought filled Dexter's mind: that the gray would run into a drift, flounder, and begin to kick. He shot a quick glance at Edith. She sat quietly beside him, showing no sign of fright. Admiration filled him.

He saw a drift ahead, and knew the grey could not make it. He gripped the lines more tightly, dexterously wrapping them about his hands. Then he seized the whip and waited.

Still going with the high bounding stride, the gray reached the drift. He plunged into it, and it closed in upon him to his flanks. He lunged wildly, then suddenly stopped and squatted, the muscles of his haunches quivering.

Just as he squatted, the whip cut his side a keen

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sharp blow. At the same time the lines jerked viciously.

"Whoa, boy!"

And the spell was broken. There was more nervous prancing, more effort to escape this irritating thing that enveloped him. But there was no more plunging, no more wild terror. And in a little he was quiet. The silence of the bells seemed to calm him.

Dexter sat for a moment in silence. A flush crept up over his face, running to the edge of his light-colored hair. He looked at her, only to encounter her eyes fixed on him.

"Now I have done it," he spoke, shamefacedly. "Got into a place I can't get out of."

"But can't we go on—not so fast?" with a wan smile.

"Not through that! The only way is to unhitch and back out."

"Oh!"

"Guess I can do it in a couple of hours or more."

Suiting action to words, he threw back the robes and got out. The snow reached nearly to his waist, and he walked through it with difficulty. But he made his way to the horse and, after patting him and speaking to him soothingly, he unhitched him.

Edith sat in the cutter while this was being accomplished, with deepening aggravation. She felt that the whole affair was somewhat ridiculous, and she did not enjoy appearing ridiculous.

She hadn't been particular about coming in the first place—with him. Of course she had enjoyed the ride, one of the few she had ever had. But the horse, surely it had been running away, even if he didn't say so.

And now to be stuck in a drift in this ridiculous manner! She saw the cutter, but a small black spot in this endless white, with herself sitting up in it like a forsaken lady in melodrama. She bit her lip, while her foot, underneath the robes, was beating an impatient tattoo on the bottom of the sleigh.

"You are not minding it, are you?" he called once.

"No, not at all," again biting her lip.

He looked at her quickly; but catching his eye, she smiled.

"Fool thing of me—to drive in here," as he continued working with the harness.

Then after a time, "Now I guess we can unload," as he made his way back to the cutter. "Once get the thing unloaded, I can scoot it back," he continued in his tumid voice.

While she noted the tone of his voice, she observed also the uncertain, half-apologetic look in his eyes as he raised them for an instant to her face.

"Will I have to get out?"

"I'll have to get you out," he amended. "Guess you wouldn't be able to make it. I'll just lift you up on to the bank."

Whether it was because, after all, she might have understood that look in his eyes, or whether it was not of her disposition to be angry long, she nevertheless threw off the heavy robes with a laugh and turned animatedly toward him.

"Not till I have fixed it for you. It is not deep up there to what it is down here. But it would be over your shoes, at that."

He bent over her to get a robe to spread on the

snow where she should stand, and in doing so he sensed the warmth of her body where she had snuggled under the heavy robes. He also noticed her overshoes—that they were miniature affairs, covering only the front of her shoes and caught over the heel by a narrow band. He smiled.

Spreading the robe on the snow, he turned toward her. She leaned forward a little, as if desiring to do what she could, yet uncertain how he should pick her up.

“Do you want me to stand up and—jump?” she asked, blushing.

“You can’t jump that far.”

He slid his arm around her waist and drew her toward him, with the other arm lifting her up and clear of the sleigh. She lay in his arms a little stiffly, as if unwilling to countenance the proceeding, necessary though it be. But at that, feeling her against him, warm and resilient, his pulse quickened at the weight of her.

“Now by the time you are half frozen I may have things turned around,” as he set her on the bank.

She got free of him quickly, once she was on the bank, and stood there on the robe, a tall slim figure, a clear-etched brown against the vast background, watching his efforts to get the cutter turned and the horse in front of it.

Having unhitched the horse, he drew the sleigh backward where the drift was not so deep and there turned it around. This done, he went for the horse, which once quieted, had stood patiently in the snow, and

getting him turned also, hitched him to the sleigh. Then he turned to her.

"Ready for another ride? Hope I don't fall down in this with you. We might not find ourselves before Christmas."

She felt the situation very awkward for her. If she made movement to go to him, to put herself in his arms, it might appear boldness on her part; but if she should say anything about attempting to reach the sleigh herself, she knew her words would sound highly fatuous, for she realized she could not get to the sleigh alone. If only she had the initiative, without having to wait to see how he would do it!

"But it will be so terribly far. Can't I walk on up the bank?"

"And step off in a ten-foot drift any minute? No, I guess you had better not try that."

He held out his arms as he spoke, and she stooped toward him, putting her hands on his shoulders and blushing to her own great annoyance as she did so. He tightened his arms about her and swung her off the bank.

"Now pray for a safe passage," he said to her; but his inward thought was that the weight of her was one he would carry forever.

And indeed, she now seemed more inclined to accept the situation lightly. She let her arms fall about his neck and adjusted herself to his clasp, resting against him easily now.

"Safe—until you fall," she said, laughing.

At one place where the drift was very deep, she held up her feet to keep them clear; and looking down at

them, he marveled they were so shapely and small. He wanted to touch them with his hands.

Once he nearly did fall. The road had been rough before the snow; and his foot slid quickly into a hole that had most likely been an enlarged track.

She gave a quick little scream as he lost his balance, and her arms tightened about his neck. But he regained his balance and looked smilingly up at her—only to find her face almost touching his own.

"That was a close shave," he said.

"Wasn't it?" she smiled, a smile that lit up her lovely animated face. And seeing it he felt again that the weight of her was one that he would gladly bear forever.

They reached the sleigh and he put her in, adjusting the robe about her and going back after the other. This also he threw over her, tucking her carefully in.

"Now maybe we will get back, seeing we got this far."

"I am sorry you did not get—where you were going," she said.

"O, that is all right," he protested, hastily. "I can go back there some other time."

It was on the return trip when the gray, as if conscious of a fault and wishing to atone for it, was trotting dependably over the white road, that he spoke for the second time that afternoon in a quiet voice that held nothing of the old boastfulness. This time his eyes were on a field where some great black boulders lay deeply imbedded in the earth at their base, but jutting high out of the ground and clean swept of snow.

"I think sometimes," he said, "when I pass by here and see those stones," with a slight wave of the hand toward them, "that the earth has been weathering away from them for a thousand years and more; that before they were uncovered other stones were doubtless above them still. And I wonder how long the old process has been going on, and where it all shall lead to in the end."

Again she shot a quick glance at him, doubtful, wondering whether he really understood, really comprehended the poetry of his speech. But he gave her scant time, but continued.

"And then," with a laugh, "I think what a great big fool I was to attempt to go out that road. Some one may knock a little sense into my head some day—if it is possible."

They drove back past Mrs. Erksen's a full half hour before she had predicted their return. But she was keen in reading signs, and quick in her deductions.

"Got in a drift, and come back the way they went," was her explanation.

He drew up in front of the parsonage with a flourish, threw back the robes and helped her out.

"Glad you could go. Maybe some day when the snow is less than fifty feet deep, I'll be going out again."

Edith entered the house and threw off her wraps, her mood wavering between laughter and impatience. Her mother looked up.

"I guess it didn't hurt you, did it?" she said, a hint of reproof still in her voice.

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"O, I guess not. The snow was not—more than forty-leven feet deep," with a little grimace.

But she checked herself, half ashamed. John Dexter—there was something underneath his veneer, something deep and wonderful. If only it should come to the top and remain there.

CHAPTER X

DR. MORGENTHAL did not visit much while the snow was so deep. He fretted a little that he could not get over his visiting list as soon as he had planned, but his fretfulness lacked energy.

Truth to tell, he did not at all mind to sit by the stove on the cold days and peruse the books he had long desired to read, but for which up to this period there had been no time.

Following a pattern he had observed while visiting a parishioner, he had secured six large tin cans and bound them together, the five on the outside inclosing the one within; and this Mrs. Morgenthal had covered with a piece of old carpet, so that it served very nicely as a footstool. Usually this footstool was near the big living-room stove, and usually Dr. Morgenthal had his feet on it warming them.

But as the snow settled and the walks were cleared he fretted in genuine desire to get out. One day he put on his overshoes and heavy coat and was preparing to go when Edith called to him.

"I want to go out too. May I go along?"

"May you! You come right along," for ever since Donna had died he could not bear the slightest disappointment for this one who remained to him.

Putting his hand on her arm as if to make her going secure, they set out up the street. The big dog was on a mat that had been prepared for him on the porch,

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but when he saw who was coming he bounded out in welcome.

"Shawkins! The old dog," he greeted, more delighted than he cared to show. "And how is the old dog?" getting him by the front paws and looking into his eyes.

And those eyes answered him that the old dog was well, but happier just now than he had been for some time.

Uncle Hi also was astir, moving about as one who, having lived through so many winters, had become acclimated to the cold by some organic accommodation until it affected him no more.

"Hwi, hwi, hwi," he chuckled. "I said as how winter wuz severe up here. You been a standin' it, though?"

"I have, brother. We keep it comfortable down there—by the stove. How are the chickens standing it?"

"Ah, them chickens," speaking with pride, "them chickens are standin' it all right. Just step down and see." For it never occurred to him that one might not be interested in chickens.

They followed him down back, where he threw open the door of a big henhouse. The chickens did not pile out as they had in warmer weather, but squatted patiently or else walked testingly about as if disgusted with the present order of nature, but wise enough to make the most of it.

"Come here, beauties," he called; and at his voice they were animated and came to greet him, craning their necks in distrust of the strangers, but pecking his old hands with impunity.

"You mind Rosetta?" he queried over his shoulder.

"I do," laughed the Doctor. "She was the haughty one."

"See can you pick her out."

Dr. Morgenthal looked over the flock, scrutinizing each, really desirous of pleasing the old man and not a little curious himself.

"There! There she is," pointing.

The fowl he indicated was in size and coloring like the rest, but she carried herself with a stiff, haughty movement, as if disdaining this forced association with her inferiors.

"Hwi, hwi. That's Rosetta. Thinks she's too good for the others. Now, I know that she ben't. But you couldn't tell her that. Jest like old Rosetta exactly!"

He squatted for a moment without further words, his mind dwelling on the picture it conjured of old Rosetta. Then he again spoke over his shoulder.

"There's others—Emma, for example. Emma, she always says what's on her mind: not wantin' to be rude or hurt anybody, but just plain outspoken; tellin' people to their faces, rather than tattlin' about 'em behind their back."

He looked up over his shoulder and winked knowingly, as if his auditor were requested to make further deductions for himself. Then turning back to the chickens, he called a command.

"Come here, Emma."

At the name, one of the chickens threw up her head with an impertinent "ki-chi-chi," but other than this, she gave no sign.

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"That's her," the old man said, almost angrily. "She hears me, but decides she will come if she wants to: since when has she taken orders?"

Here Emma went over where a companion was pecking curiously in the ground, and bobbed about her importantly.

"Tellin' her she's a fool to peck around that way, but if she will do it, it's her own lookout."

Dr. Morgenthal laughed, so aptly did the hen's actions lend themselves to such interpretation; yet the interpretation itself struck him as utterly impossible.

"And why do you call her Emma?" he asked.

"No reason. Emma, it just sounds like the way she acts."

Here Emma, as if sensing the criticism directed at her, walked disdainfully away. Almost she reminded one of a grand lady insulted because her advice had been ignored.

"That's her!" again exclaimed Uncle Hi, now highly disgusted. "Hears what we be sayin'; but flings away, tellin' us she'd rather have a body tell her what they thought to her face than go gossipin' behind her back."

"Maybe you could teach her better," Edith suggested, lightly.

"Teach her better!" taking her seriously. "No use to try. Once let 'em get an idee in their head and they think it be right. They want to change you, not to let you change them."

But here he dropped his serious manner, arose, and after closing the door put his hands in his pockets.

"Hwi, hwi," he concluded. "Chickens and people differ mostly in looks."

As they were making their way on up the street, Edith turned to her father a face registering incredulity. When she spoke her voice gave the same impression.

"Do you think he really sees it?"

"Sees what?" his eyes twinkling.

"You know! Does he know as much as you would be led to think? He talks as if he saw through things, as if he had thought through them."

"You mean he seems to know a lot about life—if he does talk about chickens?"

She nodded and he continued.

"He does. He surprised me at first. They all did, these people. They do see through things. But the explanation is simple, once you understand it: right in this little town we have as fine stock as there is in our country to-day.

"They are the old aristocrats who have remained in this quiet backwater instead of getting out where the current is swifter. But they are as smart as any who have got out. The objects of their knowledge are different, that is all."

They continued on without speaking further, thinking of this unexpected situation. Then with the irrelevance of the feminine mind, "Where are we going?" she asked him.

"I had thought to go down Shady Lane and see Brother Todi. His eyes are bothering him again."

"I am glad we are going there. I like to hear his wife talk."

But at the corner they were hailed by a hearty voice from a big bobsled that swung round the wide road and came to a halt near them.

"Just going down to your place," Knowles Carleton called out. "Mother sent me up to bring you down to supper."

"I am glad to hear it, Brother Knowles. I guess we can go without doubt. Shall we get in now?"

"Sure. Get right in. We will all go down for Mrs. Morgenthal and the boy. Just work yourselves down under those blankets. I'll stand up yet awhile."

They pulled the heavy blankets up over them, and the big bobs moved purposely forward. They were drawn by two huge black horses, enormous drafts, which, thoroughly enjoying the day themselves, trotted along in heavy majesty, champing the bits.

Carleton remained in the sled while they went in to get more clothing, and break the good news to Mrs. Morgenthal. She was delighted, then dismayed.

"But what shall we do about Earl! He can't leave school."

"Leave a bite for the boy. He can stand it."

And so a bite was left for him; and after wrapping themselves up comfortably, they went out to the waiting bobs.

"Mother said she wanted you down for a meal while we had plenty of fresh pork! We want to feed you well when you come to our house! You and Mrs. Morgenthal in the bottom, Doctor. It will be warmer down there. You and I will ride up on the seat," nodding eagerly to Edith.

Accordingly, she went up front and sat down, while

he seated himself beside her. His manner toward her, she thought with the least little leap of the heart, while masterful in a big outdoor way, was nevertheless very humble and solicitous.

"Now off we go! Watch the team. They enjoy it as well as we do. That is a great span of horses, I say."

"I should like to see them pull something heavy," Edith said, surprising herself by such a wish.

"That's the way they make you feel! They can pull all right."

Dr. and Mrs. Morgenthal, seated far in the rear, started a conversation in which they soon became absorbed, after the manner of those who know each other's minds. Carleton, listening, dropped his own voice a little.

"Say, I have never got a chance to talk to you to amount to anything since that Sunday. You are not mad yet, are you?"

"I——" glancing behind.

"They don't hear us. I never meant that the way it must have sounded to you. I used to get in that class now and then just to hear those old fellows talk."

She set herself a little, recalling again the blind agony she had experienced when the whole class seemed to be getting away from her and bordering on bitter invective. It maddened her yet to think that throughout it all he had sat in huge delight.

"I supposed you were having fun just as I was," he continued.

She turned her head toward him, and he looked into the brown eyes eagerly, his own alight and insistent; and seeing the eagerness of his face, she smiled.

"I guess it is all right. But I didn't like it then."

"Sure. I don't blame you. I hope nothing else comes between us—ever."

"How wonderful the road is!"

"It sure is. I like that hat you have on. It is a stunner!"

She was glad she had worn the big one instead of the little tubby one. But again she felt his personality beating against her, threatening to overwhelm her. If only he would not be so headlong!

She looked away, trying to appear absorbed in the beautiful country through which they were passing, but she was conscious all the time that his eyes were on her face; that he was regarding her with that animated, insistent look.

"I hope nothing ever comes between us again," he repeated in a low voice, leaning toward her.

"O, you mustn't!" she whispered, desperately, at the same time indicating those in the rear by a little jerk of her head.

And he smiled, straightening up. He did not fear those behind. What with the bells and the crackle of the snow, he knew they could not hear: he could not understand what they were saying, although they were talking.

He smiled because the thought flashed pleasantly through his mind that she desired him to cease speaking, not because she disliked to hear what he should say, but because she feared he might be overheard. He decided that when they reached home, if an opportunity afforded, he would speak further, plainly.

The Carleton home was on the south road, about

two miles and a half from town. As the bobs swung into the lane that led from the road a glimpse of the homestead was had that was entirely prepossessing.

The big red barn with its double silo; the numerous outbuildings; the orderly arrangement; and above all, the big dwelling itself, testified eloquently to a place of comfort with a history behind it and a future before it.

"There is home," Carleton said, not without pride.

Mrs. Carleton met them at the door and conducted them to the great low-ceilinged living room with its center table over which substantial and modern books were scattered, and with the big fireplace in the west end, in which a few logs, somewhat whitened with ashes, burned lazily.

"Mr. Carleton is out behind the barn, and Knowles will be busy for a while yet. But we will sit down and visit."

They sat about the big fireplace, talking in the somewhat strained and fitful manner characteristic of all conversation when points of common interest have not developed. Then Margaret, speaking in an undertone to Edith, asked her whether she would like to see the house.

The two left the room, intimately, arm in arm, and went over to the big dining room. It was expansive, like the living room, floored in narrow hardwood, low of ceiling, with an atmosphere of mellow old age.

Thence they went to the kitchen, with its well-appointed tables, the great range with covered utensils sputtering feebly upon it. The room gave the impres-

sion of an effective workshop, adjusted to high efficiency.

"You have everything!"

"Don't we? And it used to be so hard too. But Knowles came back and said that farmers always build silos and get improved machinery and hired men for their own assistance, but never care whether their wives have anything or not. So he went to work and fixed the place all up."

She opened a small door as she spoke, revealing a little room off the kitchen. It was a veritable workshop indeed, beside which the kitchen stood no comparison: ironing boards attached to the wall; sewing machine, electric irons, and in the far end, an electric washer.

"You have electricity!"

"Isn't it nice? Knowles said the electric plant did not cost as much as the grain drill and potato digger he got last year to help him in his work, so why shouldn't we have something to make it easier for us?"

"But people don't have such things on a farm!"

"The men do. They get everything as soon as it is invented," speaking as one repeating a statement heard from more vigorous lips.

"You have more than we have in town."

"I know it. We have everything."

They went up the stairs which wound up from the halls, beautiful stairs with steps of oak and white spindles crowned by a railing of old mahogany. From the upstairs hall, doors opened into rooms on either side.

One of these Margaret opened, entering a large

room with pale blue papering, which gave evidence of intimate feminine occupancy.

"This is my room."

"O what a dear! I never saw such a house."

"We have always lived in it. My grandfather built it ever so long ago."

From the window facing south they looked over far fields white with snow—a scene of vast quietness which seemed to belittle the affairs of a manufactured world. And under the window was a low radiator, warming the room in pleasant contrast to the world without.

"I should think you would stay up here all the time!"

"That shows you never lived on a farm. We have things nice, but we have our work to do."

"But, it is worth it!"

"We think so."

The supper that was served later in the big dining room was typical of the day and place. Everything spoke of large and generous hospitality. If there was an absence of small detail, there was compensation in the excellent abundance.

Mr. Carleton, an old man with lean features and conservative manner, sat at the head of the table, anxious to please, mild in voice, and putting his hand to his ear when addressed.

Mrs. Carleton, just a little tired-looking about the eyes, gave the impression of delicate health. She was slightly nervous, answering the comments and compliments a little too hastily and eagerly.

Knowles Carleton clearly had free rein in the management of all affairs; and the old couple seemed content to have it so, albeit there was a hint of sharpness

in the old man's face that indicated a capacity for decision should his own ideas conflict with the more progressive plans of his son. One suspected that at times this condition actually arose, and that when it did Mrs. Carleton was troubled.

Getting up from the table, Knowles turned to Edith, laughing. She caught the flash of the gold crown, noting also the strong lines of his face dominated by the aquiline nose.

"Now I want to show you my world," he said. "I suppose," indicating Margaret with a wave of the hand, "she has been showing you hers."

"We have been all over the house!"

"Sure. I know. She usually shows people over it right away, and then tells them in an offhand way that it really doesn't amount to so much anyway."

"I didn't, now, did I?"

"But isn't there something I can do to help you?" smiling at Margaret.

"Nothing at all. You go on with him. He had us get supper hours earlier so he could show you everything! You will have no peace till you do."

Together they went out to the big barn, and with high enthusiasm he displayed it to her: the stanchions where fine-blooded Holsteins licked in their hay and munched it complacently; the great cement trough at the end, filled with spring water; the box stalls where the horses stood fetlock deep in bedding.

He led the way toward one of these stalls, and at his approach a sleek black head with inquiring eyes, was thrust out over the manger.

"This is Kit," he said, tickling the black head under

the lower jaw. "We all claim her. Margaret uses her to ride when one of the others is not using her. What do you think of her?"

He stepped back as he asked the question, and the black head followed him, now seen to be set on a high-arched, graceful neck. Edith went up and patted her on the poll, at which she turned toward the new-comer in friendly interest.

"O, isn't she a beauty!"

"A Morgan thoroughbred. Knows almost as much as a person."

Edith picked up a bit of hay that lay at her feet, and held it out. The soft sensitive lips flirted with it a moment, then dropped it and looked at the girl.

"You are certainly hungry! Kit, you say?"

"Kit. How would you like to ride her?"

"I never was on a horse in my life! But I should love to try it," and suddenly a whole new world was open to her, a world of things she had never tried, of outdoors and beauty and naturalness.

"You may get to," he answered, meaningly. "Nothing will come between us now. I am sure of it."

Then he showed her the further improved features of his "world." And in answer to her manifest astonishment, he spoke vehemently, as one speaks when on the subject of greatest interest.

"In farming there is usually a circle of effort: corn is raised to feed the horses, and horses are raised to cultivate the corn; fences are built to turn the cows, and cows are kept to get milk to get money to build fences. Always, the circle. The end is nowhere. The farm is mortgaged to build the silo, and the cream is

sold to pay off the mortgage. The average farmer gets from his work—enough to eat and a few clothes. He works sixteen hours a day. His wife works too. And if he has children, there is always enough to do to keep them busy. Working half the time, the Bohunk coal-digger gets more. And his wife doesn't dig coal. He himself gets more for half time than the farmer and his whole family get. The farmer to-day is the man who does not get pay commensurate with the energy he expends in his work."

"It isn't fair," she cried, impressed by his words.

"I know it isn't."

"Then why is it?"

"Ignorance. Sometimes the farmer doesn't know how to farm. He is working on a traditional knowledge he has received from his father, and he holds to it like a religion. But if he should know how to produce, he is not a business man. He doesn't know how to sell. In every little town there is a produce man getting rich by disposing of products the farmer himself could dispose of if he knew enough to watch the markets."

"But I should think he could see."

"Sometimes he does, but he isn't willing to combine or cooperate. The farmer isn't socialized for community living. He wants to be a hermit."

His words struck her with tremendous force. His whole personality vibrated with conviction. His rough, virile features flamed with his own earnestness, and quickly catching his viewpoint, she flamed with him at the injustice of the situation.

"But—that's enough of that! Come here and I'll

show you how Margaret and I used to spend the rainy days."

Over in a great room which seemed to be used for nothing in particular there was a seesaw, fastened to a heavy upright. He indicated it with a little jerk of his head, turning to her with a smile.

"Now, if it wasn't so cold," he hinted, questioningly.

"I'll do it! I'm not a bit cold." And soon they were seated, one on one end, one on the other, going up and down, up and down.

"Isn't it fun," she gurgled. "I haven't done it for years and years and years."

He looked at her, perched airily up on the ridiculous old board, her face animated by a roguish smile. The picture she made was of jaunty recklessness, as of a girl throwing off conventional restraints and being just herself.

She felt his eyes on her, and did not want to meet them. She felt also the old emotion that was half fear and half joy, the emotion that was always hers when he looked at her, as he was now.

"I guess we have ridden about long enough," she said as she stopped.

But if she thought thus to put him off, she was mistaken. He came toward her determinedly. And yet there was something very uncertain and humble about him, after all.

"You know, Edith, dear, what I want to say. I have seen that you knew, more than once. But," as she stepped away from him, "you don't mean to put me off?"

"I—I can't answer you," she cried, her heart pound-

ing so furiously she could hardly control her voice. She felt smothered, oppressed.

"Is there some one else?" his eyes widening.

"N—no, there is no one else."

"All right, then," with a sigh of relief and a little possessive squeeze as he took her arm. "I'll wait."

There was no further reference made to the subject until just before they reached the old parsonage on the way back that night. He was bringing them home, as he had taken them down, and she was on the seat beside him.

"But I don't see any reason to make it so very long," he said, *à propos* of nothing.

"We—you mustn't speak of it," seemingly understanding.

"Until——?"

"Never!" with a mischievous lilt to her voice.

CHAPTER XI

“YOU don’t mean they be married!”

“Married. My Fred comes home and he says to me, says he, ‘Sally, Vic’s took her.’”

“Took her! You mean to tell me Vic Kline’s actually married that woman old enough to be his mother! Set down, Sally Bay,” and Mrs. Erksen’s invitation was also a request for further and more specific information.

“He has. And what is more,” she continued, triumphantly, “his folks is mad about it.”

“His folks mad!”

“Mad. Law, yes. I didn’t think old Thad Kline would take on that way over anything. Maybe they’s some good in him after all. When he hears that Vic had run off to York State after that woman he comes to town as mad as a hornet. Seems he didn’t realize Vic would go so far till he actually got word of the weddin’.

“Letter comes from Vic day before yesterday. My Fred sees the envelope when it comes to the Office, and a few hours after the free delivery man left, old Thad come a foamin’.”

“Did you hear about their wedding?”

Sally Bay had not heard much. Her information was necessarily limited. But this question was asked her by Edith Morgenthal, who, like herself, had come

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to call on Mrs. Erksen that afternoon; and Sally Bay did not want to disappoint the girl.

So while she knew but little, she surmised much. Or was it not really knowledge? She knew Maggie Volten, the alluring and sinuous widow, and knowing her as she did, could she not predict the kind of wedding she would have almost as accurately as though she had been there to see? Besides, she knew Victor Kline, and was sure he would assent to any proposal the widow should make.

So after all, did she not know quite a little about the wedding? Black was Maggie's favorite color, so of course she would dress in black, even at the wedding. Trust her for that!

Also, she liked to walk in an easy sinuous way that reminded one of a lazy cat. So wouldn't she walk with Victor in this manner? When it comes to knowing, what more do you need?

So in answer to Edith's question, it developed that the Widow Volten was married in the parsonage of the minister. Where else would she be married? And that she was dressed in clinging black. A ring was used too. And of course Maggie was wearing the ring Vic had given to Lilly!

"But what be Thaddeus goin' to do about it?" Mrs. Erksen asked. "They's married now, so what'll it amount to?"

"He's goin' to disinherit him!"

"No!"

"He is. First he comes to the Office to mail Vic a letter, and the next place he went was to the notary's."

"It serves him right."

"And it'll serve him righter when she gits tired of him and gits another divorce," Sally Bay declared.

"And she'll do jest that."

Edith did not join fully in the discussion, having but recently been admitted to terms of intimacy and confidence. Besides, she was the minister's daughter and as such could not join too openly in discussions of this nature without running the risk, in some mysterious manner, of involving her father.

Mrs. Erksen's manner throughout had been not a little constrained, save now and then when surprise had completely got the better of her. It was her nature to be reserved; nor did she want to let down too fully in the presence of Edith. Consequently, having heard all, she appeared indifferent. Letting her knitting fall into her lap, she looked out of the window. "Cutters don't run well to-day," she said. "Snow be meltin'."

Somewhat under the influence of her reserve, the little group broke up, Sally Bay hurrying home to the work that always seemed to await her there, while Edith went up by the Office on her way back home, to get the mail. Coming out of the Office, she encountered John Dexter.

It was her first real meeting with him since the day of the sleighride. And there was something—was it the look in his eyes?—that reminded her of their enforced intimacy on that occasion.

"How-de, Miss Morgenthal. Didn't look to see you out to-day. Slush does not make the best walking in the world."

"But I don't mind," she answered, brightly.

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As they walked down the street he took a book from under his arm and carried it in his hand for a little way, seemingly not conscious of having it at all. Then he glanced down at it.

"Here is a book I have just been reading. Quite a fine one too. Did you ever happen to read it?"

"'The White Silence'? No, but I have heard a lot about it. You say you liked it?"

"First rate. Like to read it?"

"Why, yes, if you are sure you are through with it."

"I am. Don't take me long to finish one."

"Thank you. I shall take good care of it," she smiled.

"How are you making it with that big Sunday school class of yours?" he asked after a moment.

"It is awful," she answered, feelingly. "Just terrible."

"Old Guiraud great on explaining things?"

"Every one of them is. Only old Mrs. Sigfried. She just sits there with a smile on her face and nods her head, no matter what is said. But all the others explain," she concluded with a wry smile.

"But that's easier than to have to talk all the time yourself."

"I am getting used to it," she said in a tone that gave impression she had not been quite so desperate as her previous words would indicate. "But it is no fun. I just wish you had it once."

"I taught it. That's one of the blessings of being superintendent. He has to take any class whose teacher is not on hand."

"Then," she coaxed, "how would you teach the lesson for next Sunday?"

"What is it about? I don't spend more than half the week in studying them."

"It seems to be mostly about healing; though I really don't know just what it does mean," confidentially.

"O, yes, I remember. Where a man was healed without doctoring a year—or because he couldn't. The thing to do there is to get them going on all this stuff about healing. You ought to take an easy chair to that class so you could lean back and take it easy, once you got them started."

"That is all right to say! You just come and try it next Sunday."

"Will I? You just watch for me. And bring an easy chair."

She jumped at this proffer eagerly, turning her face up to him with a smile that lighted it up as he had not seen it before. When they reached his street and he turned in, he still carried in his memory the picture.

Going into the living room, he looked through the window at her as she walked buoyantly down the street. His eyes followed her until she turned in at her own door, and even when she was no longer objectively visible, he saw her in his mind and lingered caressingly over each dear movement. John Dexter was near to falling in love.

The following Sunday morning, after the classes had been asked to take up the study of the lesson, Dexter came over and sat down in the Old People's Class. His doing so caused no surprise, as, when he did not have

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to take the place of an absent teacher, he usually visited around among the classes, first in one, then in another.

Edith saw him coming, sighed almost imperceptibly as she straightened up in her seat, but otherwise maintained toward him an attitude of studious indifference.

After her first eager relief that he should come into the class and help her out, there had followed a complete reaction, when she came to anticipate his possible presence, not as a help but as an unnecessary burden.

Up to this time she had not thought enough about him to know in what light she did consider him. From the first her unstudied emotional attitude toward him had been that of the competent toward the incompetent, of the precise for the careless.

Without deliberate planning she had unconsciously reacted toward him as toward one not altogether refined. His fustian manner, his persistent tendency to exaggerate almost every utterance, had repelled her, even as one of delicate nature always is repelled by the person of coarse grain.

But when after his offer to help her out she had actually thought about him as associating with her in the teaching of the class, she rebelled at even the appearance of having made common cause with him in anything. The fear had sprung up within her that other people might not understand, but might think that collusion with him meant approval of him.

She had decided, therefore, that she would not lean on him for any assistance whatever, but instead, would make clear her indifference of him by subtly antagonizing any opinion he might advance. By all means she

desired to avoid giving rise to the thought in anyone that she approved him, and thereby passed judgment upon herself.

Consequently, when at the beginning of the study period he glanced over at her with a smile intended to be both reassuring and a reminder of the little secret between them, she ignored him completely, and instead of smiling back at him, with a manner showing a touch of hostility she explained the bearing of the lesson.

"Just to know, as a historical fact, that this man was healed centuries, ages, ago, is not of any particular benefit to us," she concluded, and her clever putting of the situation showed she was learning, and that rapidly, the art of keeping a lively interest sustained over a given interval.

"The thing that has bearing for us is: can we expect such a thing to-day? Is the modern healing of which we read purely imaginative and due to suggestion, or is it actual; and might it happen to any of us. Further than this even, is it something we have a right to expect at any time?"

She was as surprised as she was gratified, at the facile manner with which she had put the situation before them. Far different, this, she thought agreeably, from the halting incoherency of her initial efforts.

She wanted to see how Dexter took this beginning. She felt sure it would impress him that she was not the nervous novice leaning upon him for support. But she did not look toward him.

Even before she had finished speaking Mr. Ackers was regarding her with every evidence of distress. And

as soon as she ceased he shook his head and waved his hands deprecatingly. "I like to listen to what is said," he averred, mildly, "but it is all too deep for me. So please don't call on me."

"It maught be too deep for me, and again it maught not," Mrs. Westlake spoke up, aggressively. "Though how we would ever know anything if we allus stopped dead and give it up, is more than I know.

"Is there healin' to-day?" speaking sharply with eyes bickering aggressively. "There be. It ain't too deep fer me to answer that. When I know a thing I can answer it. I had a carbuncle on my neck. It had been there a long time and was gittin' sorer and sorer. Then it was taken off by divine healin' after I had done everything under creation for it."

She spoke these words with the air of one throwing down a gantlet and daring anybody to pick it up. When she finished she shut her lips tightly and leaned back in her seat.

Old Guiraud listened with a tolerant air, glancing quickly from one member of the class to another, his lips pursed in a disdainful smile. But when there seemed to be on the part of the class a disposition to take seriously this statement concerning divine healing, his disdain gave place to marked disgust.

"Poof!" he stuttered. "I request ze pardon. A car-r-buncle taken off your neck? How do you know it would not have gone off anyway?"

"Because it hadn't gone off, that's how!" Her tone was flatly defiant.

"But maybe it would have gone off that very day, having run ze course."

"It had had plenty of time to run its course, and hadn't run it."

"Excuse," he said, summarily. "But you don't know."

"It was you as had it, and not me, was it?" she asked, coldly.

"Me? I have no ze car-r-buncle. But the only way you could have known it would have not been got well anyway would have been to die first."

"To die!" she fairly spat at him.

"Before you would know," he explained, elaborately, "that that was a case of ze divine healing, you would have to live twice: Once, and die with your car-r-buncle without praying; and another time, and pray and be healed of your car-r-buncle, and not die. Only then would you know. Only then would you know it would have killed you without ze—ze priere."

"Who's talking about a car-r-buncle!" she demanded, witheringly, with scornful imitation of his pronunciation. "I said a carbuncle was on my neck. It was *my* neck; it was taken off *my* neck; I did not have to die to know that it was *my* neck; and I will have no one tell me it was not taken off."

"But the point is," Dexter said, smoothly, intent now on showing Edith how entirely simple was the handling of such a situation, "you do not know absolutely that it would not have got better that day anyway. Understand," he hastened to add when she drew in her breath sharply, "I am not saying you are wrong. I merely want to bring out Mr. Guiraud's point, so that we can discuss both sides of the question."

"Young man," and as she spoke she impaled him with

a gaze as sharp and cold as an icicle, "when I say a thing that I knows, I don't like to have no young upstart jump in and begin tellin' me I don't know what I'm talkin' about."

Dexter colored at this, drawing back a little. And Edith, seeing that he did, smiled with relish and nodded approval to Mrs. Westlake. Perhaps he would see how he liked it!

"Give me ze pardon. If this thing is true, why is it that some people who pray to be healed are not healed?"

"It's because of their sins," Mrs. Westlake answered, belligerently, with complete innocence of the assumption underlying her position.

"Then ze one that says he is healed also says he is better than all ze ones who are not healed," he answered, bringing out the implication.

"I want you to know," she snapped, realizing now where he was leading her but determined to hold her ground, "that if I hadn't been healed I wouldn't have said so."

"That is what I say," Dexter again interpolated, determined to handle the situation competently, but leaning now toward Mrs. Westlake's position as desirable both of appeasing her and of avoiding her sarcasm. "That is just it. What we want to do is to remember that fact, and get the argument from the other side also."

"'Pears to me if I was goin' to take one side, I'd stick to it," she snapped at him ungratefully.

"But why can't we give heed to ze reason! Here is a car-r-buncle." He held up a finger to represent

the carbuncle. "It gets well. Now! Was it healed, or did it just get well anyway? I say it, we cannot tell; we do not know."

Dexter looked at Edith, eager to make it clear to her that he desired to help her out. But when he caught her eye, she was regarding him without a sign of recognition.

Quite to her surprise, he flushed. To her surprise, because she had thought it would be hard to convey to him any impression; she had considered him too insensitive to fine shades of feeling and expression to understand her.

But he flushed, slowly, dropping his eyes. Taking his watch from his pocket, he glanced at it, trying to appear unperturbed. But the hand that held it trembled.

"I guess it will soon be time to close," he said, rising and going up front.

And as she saw him go a little rush of pity went to her heart. She saw she had hurt him; that he had understood and keenly felt her attitude. And at the same time she knew that his purpose in coming into the class had been less to display his wisdom than to help her.

Like a flash she recalled the day of the sleighride. Then for a moment or two he had cast aside his irritating boldness and spoke as a man who has the mind of a dreamer. Perhaps she was misreading him.

She regarded him as he stood up front, and for the first time she thought of him as she might think of any other man, a person with feelings and hopes—even with ambitions. It was her turn to flush—with shame

at herself. Considering him vulgar, she had shown less politeness than he—

But close on her shame came the spontaneous desire of her open nature to make amends, and she instantly resolved that she would make it up to him for this very rude thing which she had done. She would make him understand that she was sorry.

At the close of the preaching service she endeavored to seek him out, if perchance she might be able to make him understand that she was sorry. But Knowles Carleton found her before she found him.

"Here you are," he greeted in open delight, pulling her into a pew while the departing congregation went leisurely by. "It has been an age since I saw you."

"Then an age is four days. You saw me Tuesday."

"A day is an age when I am wanting a look at you. And I am sure that to-day you are looking cuter than you ever did before."

She caught her breath at his abrupt words, then smiled at him mischievously. "If you talk like that, it may be many ages before you see me again."

"Heaven forbid! But—suppose then we make it two days."

"We had better be going, I think."

"And so we had," he agreed, noting with consternation the deserted aisles. "When you are around, time just flies. *Tempus fugit*."

"You are smart!"

"Maybe I'll get up some evening this week."

"Is that so?" and she left him, with another flash of the mischievous smile.

She hastened her steps, hoping on the way to over-

take Dexter. She was sorry, for she thought she knew how he should feel; and she smarted inwardly with the sense that the role she had played pointed to that in her which she had meant to rebuke in him. She decided she would not speak openly about what had occurred. She merely wanted to look at him, to give him to understand. But she did not overtake him.

CHAPTER XII

DR. MORGENTHAL sat with his slippered feet on the quintuple footstool, his fingers interlaced on his breast, thinking. Mrs. Morgenthal sat near, curious as to the content of his thought and desiring to share it with him, but questioning him not, knowing that in time he would tell her, even as he had always done.

She knew the moment he decided to speak; knew from the drumming of his fingers on the backs of his hands, from the slight pursing of the lips. She knew further, that he was now to speak, not of a trivial affair, but of one of those conclusions he was ever drawing from his observation of human life.

"Winnie, the difference in people is not so much inward as outward. Here are two boys: the one lives in the country and knows a lot about horses and millet and soils; the other lives in the city and knows a lot about figures and interest and collateral—he works in a bank. We call the one a rustic, a hayseed, a common laborer; while the other we call a gentleman, a cosmopolite, a financier. This latter man we admire and honor, while for the other we have no liking, tolerating him only as he himself tolerates his hogs—because they give him food.

"But now, stop and think it over. The difference between them is not inward; it is only objective: it is

a difference in the objects of their knowledge. The one knows one thing; the other another. Where one is keen, the other is ignorant, and both alike. The farmer's knowledge, of its kind, is as complete and honorable as the banker's. Yet we place one above the other.

"It is just like saying the sense of sight is of a higher order than the sense of taste. It is not so. There is a difference in function, and the question is one of difference and not of superiority or inferiority."

"Yes?" she encouraged, knowing that the final point to his conclusion was yet to be made.

"It is about these people here! When we first came here I thought we had been placed in a 'backward' community. I thought the people lacked worth. And then I got to knowing them. I discovered that their human qualities are as finely developed as the same qualities in any people we know. Sympathy, humanity—intelligence even, though with different objective—are as clearly manifest as anywhere. The only difference is objective: They deal with different situations."

He ceased speaking, interlacing his fingers again on his breast and leaning back in his chair. She knew that a further application of the same thought had occurred to him, and that he had stopped to consider it. And after a time he spoke of it.

"What do we mean when we divide people into classes? We should know that inherently they are the same; and we should not value one kind of effort more than another. The man who destroys his own and others' bodies on an expedition to seek for an imaginary pole that cannot be identified when found, is

a great scientist and a hero, while the man who raises potatoes for a just figure and thereby conserves life is a hayseed!"

"But I don't see. Surely the scientists who seek for the north pole are wonderful. Think, they take their very lives in their hands in the interest of science."

"I know, I know," almost wearily, albeit he had long since learned that she was far less an iconoclast than he. "But there is something there to think about, at that."

So moved was he that he put on his shoes and overcoat and went out. First he went to the Office, but finding no mail, went off down the street. Mrs. Erksen saw him coming, and nodded her head knowingly.

"Is Brother Erksen in?" he inquired, diffidently.

"He be. He and Mr. Guiraud be upstairs."

"Then I will go right up," he said with relief.

He went up, and entering, found the two old men absorbed in a game of checkers. They looked up as he entered, but he hastened to assure them. "Go right ahead, brothers. I will look on till you finish. I just wanted to drop in a while."

"You don't mind?" Hope Erksen asked with undisguised eagerness, although with the air of the host who is willing to do his duty. Then at the further assurance of the newcomer, "We are in a putty tight place, 'n I want to squash him!" he chuckled.

"Squash him," old Guiraud snorted, his eyes dancing. "When he squash me I will know it!"

It seemed that he had but two remaining men, while Hope Erksen was fortunate enough to have three. Guiraud's desire, accordingly, was to trap two of his

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opponent's men, while Erksen was gleefully maneuvering to pick up one.

The game progressed with vast tranquillity. There was no evidence of haste, for the two old men besides knowing their game thoroughly, had plenty of time in which to finish it. And in the warm old disordered room they were content.

Dr. Morgenthal became an interested spectator, watching each move with concern the while he secretly hoped that the one who should be beaten would not take his defeat too seriously.

In the end and even as he had predicted, Hope Erksen "squashed" his opponent. Watching his chance with his keen old eyes alert to observe the slightest opening, his finger shot out suddenly with a triumphant eagerness. He made a move, then straightened.

"Jump 'er!" he cried. "You've got to jump 'er."

Old Guiraud sat hunched up for some time, trying to find a way out of his difficulty. But in the end he jumped, and leaned back in his chair with a sheepish grin on his face.

"He got ze bulge on me!"

Hope Erksen got up and fixed the fire in the stove, poking it, a contented smile on his face. Not till he had finished and sat back down again did he speak to Dr. Morgenthal. But when he did speak it was to indicate that he had surmised much.

"You ha' somethin' on your mind," he stated in a matter-of-fact tone. "Anything you want to talk about? Or," with a sly wink, "do you want a taste o' what I just give Guiraud?"

"No, brother. Not this time. I have been thinking

about what we talked about the first time I came up here. We discussed civilization, saying that, after all, it is external and not as valuable as people seem to think.

"I have been thinking. . . . Civilization stands for modernism; it means conveniences of home and travel; it means ease and luxuries, telephones and delivered mail. But all these things are outward. Now the question is, Can these outward things produce the proper inward state?"

"That is ze question I ask!" old Guiraud spoke up, excitedly, a pudgy finger emphasizing his words. "To-day we attach ze great importance to ze external. In what part of town is ze man's house? Does he have servants to wait on him? Is he up-to-date? Civilization means three things: it means a surplus in economy, where everybody can have enough without anyone's being in want; it means a mastery over nature, such as good roads and lights and heating, and ze like; and it means conveniences, like ze typewriter and ze delivered mail. That is what we are working for to-day. But it is all outward and does not satisfy when we get it. You will give me ze pardon, but I have had things; I was once opulent, riche. But I was not happy until, losing these things, I began to live in ze—what you say?—ze inward parts."

"Mebbe I will say a word naow," and Hope Erksen leaned back comfortably and dropped his voice to a droning pitch. "Mebbe I will explain kind o' like a 'nitiation to you, brother. Paxton ain't like a lot of taowns. Th' ain't no rush here, 'n people are putty well acquaint. We didn't make it that way deliberate.

It's a backwater, not bein' in the swift current. But Brother Guiraud and me ha' talked it over. I never thought much abaout it 'fore he come. Jest lived it. But we've talked it over. It's like this: There's a pup across the way as has a habit o' chasin' his tail, goin' round 'n round atter it. Naow, that's what the world's a doin' to-day, we figger—chasin' round atter contentment when all the time it's inside 'n needs waitin' fer, not runnin' atter. Here in this taown we don't do that. We set around 'n talk a lot. We don't work so desprit hard, 'n we don't hurry. Hurryin's like two boys runnin' fer the cherry tree. If both 'ud take their time, they 'ud git there safe 'n sound; but when one runs, the other's got to run too, to keep him f'm gittin' 'em all."

He paused here, and in the interval of silence a small voice was heard, as from the landing on the second floor.

"Grampa, O, Grampa!"

The old man straightened up quickly, holding up a hand for silence. "He don't know you be here. Jest set still." Then lifting his voice, "Come on up," he called.

There was a scurrying of feet on the stairs, the door-knob turned feebly as though manipulated by a very small hand, the door opened, and a small boy bounced into the room. He was fairly hopping across the room, arms outstretched and eager, when he saw the visitors.

Instantly his arms dropped, and he looked at his grandfather with widening eyes, shrinking back. But the old man made a cubby-hole of his knees and crooked a forefinger.

"Come on, naow. You must not mind the gentlemen."

Reassured by the familiar voice, he approached and snuggled up to the old man, looking the while rather disappointedly at the company. But he was lifted to a knee.

"Naow, what is it the boy wants?"

Silence.

"Can't you tell?"

Still silence.

"Whisper in grampa's ear what he wants."

The red lips were puckered and put very close. They moved rapidly, the while a furtive glance shot sidewise at the onlookers. Then the little body jerked erect, emitting a delighted little giggle, as he studied the old face.

"Naow, naow," in a doubtful voice, "I am not so sure. 'Pears I ha' forgot where it is. If I guess the fust time, it'll be all right, but if I miss the fust time, there ben't no use to look again."

He got up and looked about perplexedly, the while the little boy held his breath in delighted suspense.

"It is mebbe there—No, I'm afraid to try that place. There? I don't hardly think so. There! I'll try that place. If it's not there, we'll jest have to give it up."

He pulled open the drawer of one of the small tables, revealing a small paper bag. "Ha, there it is, fust thing!" he cried.

"O, goody, goody!" bouncing up and down.

He took from the bag two peppermint balls, of rather generous size, and at once the small hand was extended to receive them.

"What do you say?"

"Thank you, grampa."

"And what else?"

"I will not tell mamma."

The old man squatted, and two very soft arms wound about his neck, and a pair of very soft and moist lips were pressed to his own. Then the candy changed hands.

"Naow, before you go, tell the gentlemen what your name is."

"Phillips Erksen."

"And whose boy are you?"

"Grampa's."

Phillips went out, closing the door behind him, and found his way downstairs. As he entered the living room Mrs. Erksen noted the candy in his hand and sighed.

"Be careful, Phillips, you don't get that on your waist."

"Yes, grama."

Glancing out, she saw Mrs. Morgenthal coming down the street. For a brief instant she sat looking out at her, while the old glint of hostility showed in her eyes.

Many women did not like Mrs. Morgenthal. It was not because she put on airs, or because she was in anything dictatorial. She was at all times humble, and occasionally was almost apologetic in her manner. It was because—they did not like her!

Mrs. Erksen knitted a little more rapidly, was a little more definite in her manner, as she sat waiting. And when Mrs. Morgenthal entered, though she was

made welcome, the atmosphere of the room was not a little tense.

"I knew the Doctor was coming here, though he didn't say so. So I thought I would come and visit with you while he visited Mr. Erksen."

"You be callin' much?"

"What I can," with an open smile. "There are so many places to go, and we are invited out so much."

"Most ministers be. Their place be established for 'em, whether they do anything to earn it or not."

"Isn't it? The people are always lovely. I certainly do appreciate it."

"While others has to work for it," ignoring the interruption.

"What a dear little boy," as she changed the subject hastily. "Come here, Phillips. What have you? Candy? And where did you get it?"

"I promised grampa not to tell," he answered, faithfully.

"O, you did?"

"You do your own knittin'?"

"O, no. We always buy the things. It is so much easier."

"But it be a savin' to knit 'em."

"I know. But the extra work more than balances it."

"You be that busy?"

"O, I suppose I could find the time. But as long as there is no need for it, I don't worry."

"The Doctor said he liked the mittens I knit more than any he had ever bought."

"I am sure he did. It was so thoughtful of Mr. Erksen to give them to him. They get along so nicely."

"They all be upstairs now. Do 'pear like men always finds this house comfortable, way they run in here."

"I don't doubt it. I can hardly keep my husband from coming here every day."

"Like it allus is," she nodded, complacently, "'cept with the last minister, young Mr. Allen. He strut up and down past my house for two years and never a call." And with this she made her needles fly.

"You have any trouble with your man 'count indigestion?" she queried after an interval during which Mrs. Morgenthal had maintained a discreet silence.

"Hardly any. He likes everything but parsnips."

"He don't like parsnips?" in surprise.

"He can't bear them."

"Usually a man likes victuals when they be cooked good."

The sound of footsteps on the stairs came to them distinctly. The meeting in the attic had broken up, and the old men were dispersing.

"Are you here, Winnie?" the Doctor asked as he entered the living room.

Mrs. Erksen looked him up and down quickly, and the hurried inspection revealed that his trousers inclined to bag at the knees. This fact seemed to give her both confirmation and a certain grim satisfaction. The look she now directed at Mrs. Morgenthal held a condemnatory glint.

"You are not going, Doctor?" addressing him instead of her.

"We are all finished. And I got ze—ze beating of my life," old Guiraud said, as if even yet he couldn't understand it.

CHAPTER XIII

EARL walked down the street with about as great a show of spirit as his usual indolence ever allowed. There actually seemed a touch of alacrity in his movements, as though it might not be beyond him to hurry.

Under his arm he carried a sizable bundle. It was done up in newspaper, and gave evidence of inexpert wrapping, but he squeezed it to him affectionately, thereby showing that the contents, whatever they might prove to be, were to his unqualified liking.

He reached the parsonage and entered almost at a bound, here also displaying unwonted energy. Quickly he swept the rooms with his eye, but saw no one.

"Ma," he called in his uncertain voice.

"She is not here," came from upstairs.

"Where is she?"

"They are down at Erksen's."

He received this intelligence with marked signs of disappointment. Then, "If she doesn't like it, it's her own fault," he sulked. "I can't wait."

Going up to his room, he placed the package on the bed and tore off the wrapping. He revealed in so doing a very smart khaki uniform, faced generously with fancy braid and clearly intended to maintain its wearer's high self-respect. Earl had joined the Scouts.

The package, it seemed, contained two uniforms, one of which he donned. The other he let remain on the bed.

"He ought to be here any time now," he remarked to himself. "And he will have to come up here to put it on. I'll stay here."

With every button of his uniform fastened, he stepped briskly out on the floor, came to stiff attention and gave the salute. He walked to the end of the room, executed an uncertain about-face and stalked to the other end.

His face grew hard, with the grim, bulldog look of the veteran campaigner who has endured much, but who still faces the uncertain future with iron will.

"Hep! hep! hep!" he growled. "Get in step."

He thought he heard some one coming up the walk, and he lost his martial manner to hurry and look. But the passer-by did not turn in.

Going back to his task, he went through divers exercises, at first briskly, but with growing feebleness as time passed and no one came.

"I don't see why he don't come," he quavered at last. "How am I to learn these things without some one to show me!"

Still time passed and no one appeared. He picked up the uniform from the bed but only to fling it down impatiently. The telephone rang, and when he came away from it his lower lip sagged and his head was bowed.

He went back upstairs, again picked up the uniform, again made as if to fling it down impatiently, but in the act of doing so he hesitated, a look almost of hope lighting up his countenance.

The extra uniform in his hand, he went across the hall. He found Edith very comfortably located, read-

ing The White Silence with excited eagerness. Judging from her flushed face, Dexter had been entirely right when he pronounced it a fine book.

"Say, Ede," he began in a tone that wheedled, "I want you to do something for me."

"Do something. I—what have you got there?" looking him over and noting the extra uniform.

"Scout uniform like this one I have on," he said, displaying his person proudly. "Grif was to come down and march with me this afternoon. But he 'phoned he couldn't come. I thought you could call out the orders for me if you would."

"Call out the orders?" she questioned, doubtfully.

"Sure, call out 'march' and 'halt' and 'about-face' and the like, so I will have something to march by."

"I suppose I could," she agreed, though reluctantly. "But how am I to know what the orders are?"

"I will teach you," he responded. "Just come on outside where we will have plenty of room."

"But I can't do that!" and she drew back quickly. What would people think to see her out there giving commands? "Can't we do it in the house as well?"

"O, I guess we could," trying not to show his disgust. It just went to show how little girls understood such things. "Though it won't be half as good."

But in the end he had to consent. "At least we will go down to the living room where I will have room to turn around."

"Now, the first thing to learn is, 'Attention!'" he explained, importantly, when all was ready. For his Scout Master had seen service in the Philippines, and to the usual activities of the Scout he had added very

elaborate military maneuvers. "It's like this," he continued, standing up stiffly, heels together and arms stiff at sides.

Edith fell obediently into attention.

"Now right-face!" he commanded sharply, himself turning awkwardly to the right.

After observing his movements, she also turned right-face, standing up primly, her serious face making her appearance adorable.

"Now left-face!" and they turned back to the original position.

He then explained that it was time to do a little marching; that in this marching they should go the two abreast; and that in starting, the left foot was always advanced first. They faced toward the kitchen.

"Attention! Forward-d-d, march!"

It took them a few steps to catch step, the initial left-foot movement having been executed somewhat faultily. But after that they marched to the kitchen in fair order.

Reaching the kitchen, his step resounded pleasantly on the linoleum-covered floor. "We will stay out here," he decided instantly. "We can hear ourselves walk on the floor."

He was in the midst of explaining to her that the proper posture for the breathing exercise is attention, except that the hands are placed at the waist so that the thumbs touch at the back, when she rebelled.

"But I don't want to do this, Earl. You are marching me around; I am not doing you any good."

This hurt his dignity. He had been explaining things to her. But did she not need to be taught? "All

right," he said, sulkily. "I ought to go outside anyway."

Scarcely had he reached the front yard when Knowles Carleton happened along. He had come up to town on business, and had no real excuse whatever to make this detour down here. But he had failed to catch a glimpse of Edith anywhere up town—though why he thought he might was more than he could have told—so he had come down, hoping.

Sight of Earl marching stiffly up and down the walk gave him a perfect excuse for stopping. In that instant he blessed Earl for simply being alive.

"Hello, Earl," he called. "Practicing up on Scout work, are you?" His mellow tone clearly showed that he coveted this lad's good opinion.

"A little. Ever do Scout work?"

"No, but I am interested. What do you do?"

"We drill first," in a voice calculated to give the impression that to one unacquainted with Scoutcraft a full understanding of the mysteries would be impossible.

"Do you do any riding?"

"No riding," was the brief response, given in a way that said their work included only desirable features.

"We have a fine saddler down at our place, in case you ever want to learn to ride."

In vain Earl tried to assume indifference to this. But he failed. He had seen Kit; he had also a desire to be master of many abilities, and this offer gave him an opportunity.

"Thank you," he returned in a changed voice. "I may get a chance to try it next summer."

"You are welcome, any time."

Then after a brief interval Knowles brightened again. "It is hard trying to march by yourself," he said, sympathetically. "I had enough military training in college to know that."

"You bet it is. Grif was to come down and help me. But he 'phoned he couldn't come."

"Maybe I could help!" A friend is better than an enemy any day. There might be many and various advantages in having Earl on his side!

"Would you?"

"Sure!"

Then indeed did matters pick up. Carleton, if not quite as expert as Grif, at least knew how to march. Besides, he roared out his commands in a voice that left nothing to be desired from the standpoint of martial severity. Earl liked this severity; he was a hard man himself!

In the midst of the maneuvers Dr. and Mrs. Morgenthal came home. Seeing Earl, they were at first puzzled as to who his teacher might be. But Carleton did not leave them long in ignorance.

"We are drilling," he said, genially. "Takes me back to old times."

"You have not been in the army?" This from Mrs. Morgenthal.

"No, just a little training in college."

"But won't you come in, Brother Knowles?" the Doctor pressed.

Earl's countenance dropped at the invitation, and Knowles, seeing it, laughed. "Thank you," he answered. "I will be glad to just as soon as we have finished."

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The lesson continued, but it lacked the dash that had characterized the initial stages. Carleton glanced more and more frequently toward the house. Finally he stopped.

"Sorry, old Scout," he said, apologetically. "But I will have to be getting back home soon, so I suppose I'd better go in."

"Thanks for helping me," Earl managed awkwardly.

"Not at all. Glad to do it. And remember that ride when you get time," he called over his shoulder.

Edith herself answered his knock, for Mrs. Morgenthal was in her own room, and the Doctor had gone at once to his study. He would prepare a sermon about this thing for next Sunday.

When they were seated in the living room, Carleton thought that she presented the most lovely picture he had ever seen. Some way here in her own home, dressed simply, she was even more appealing than when seen on the street or at church.

There was a luster about her eyes, a richness to the deep, dusky tints of her cheeks. Her slightly oval face was soft as velvet, gaining a hint of decisiveness from her firm little chin.

"I suppose I ought to beg your pardon for coming to-day," he said. But his face expressed neither contrition nor regret. "I didn't intend to when I left home. But when I got this near you I couldn't stand to go back without at least a glimpse of you."

"You were a great help to Earl," she answered, mischievously.

"Sure." He grinned broadly. "Earl is a great Scout. But it was this sight of you that I wanted."

It was hard to stop him, increasingly difficult to put him off. Nor was she just sure that she wanted to put him off. A new feeling came over her—a sort of tingling, racing delight.

But when he got up and took a step toward her she felt again the old panic. She didn't just want to stop him, but at the same time she was not ready.

But he was coming toward her. He stopped beside her chair, looking down. And in a flutter of trepidation she arose, bringing her face very close to his. He took her hand, and it seemed to her she had not the strength to draw it away.

"Is it too soon now, Edith?" he asked, softly, a strange humility giving entreaty to his words.

This new humility—she could have dealt with his old dominating self far more easily. Her breath came quickly as she struggled for some adequate answer but found none.

Then before she realized what he was about he bent nearer, slipping his arms about her. She felt herself drawn to him, held tightly to his breast. Just a confused glimpse of his face, and his lips were pressed against her own.

For one breathless moment she remained perfectly still in his arms. A delicious exultation was singing through her. This big strong boy, he had come to her, he was hers!

Then a step sounded on the stairs, the measured deliberate step of her father. She sprang away from Carleton, her face crimson, opened the door to the stairs, and as soon as her father had descended, fled up to her own room.

She had not been there long when her mother rapped gently and entered. Edith was fingering The White Silence, but with no sign of concentration. There was instead a tell-tale pink in her cheeks.

"Why, Pattie!" Mrs. Morgenthal exclaimed. "Why are you so—so flushed?"

And it was then, when she was just on the point of telling her mother everything, that Edith felt a peculiar but unmistakable doubt. An hour before she would have put it away from her with a smile. But now it persisted, constricting her throat, puckering her brows, causing her to hesitate.

Perhaps it was the implications that would follow her telling her mother of what had just taken place below that brought her face to face with herself. For to tell all would be equivalent to settling the issue once for all, making up her mind, deciding definitely about her future.

All at once she shrank from making up her mind in this definite way. The act seemed too momentous, too much like cutting off all hope of changing one way or the other.

Just then she was not absolutely certain she loved Knowles Carleton. She had thought—But now—She wished he had not kissed her; wished he had given her more time to think things out.

But more than anything else she was vexed that at this, of all times, thoughts of John Dexter obtruded themselves upon her. Why was it so? What did he have to do with her? She didn't like him; she positively disliked him.

But there he was. With all his bombast, all his

faults, there he was. Only now he was less faulty than before. Some way through the alchemy of her own soul, he was transformed. He was a dreamer, a poet, fine and exceedingly gentle.

That night she lay long in bed with wide eyes, trying to straighten out this tangle. A few hours before she had had no doubt. Her heart had been free, singingly, exultantly free. That morning, even, she had believed it. But now there was a strange twist to her emotions that made certainty impossible.

She did not try to express her feelings. But in a vague way she imaged on the one hand a big delightful world, and on the other a soft and chastened world; and she felt dimly that the present demand was for a choice between these worlds, and that choice she did not want to make.

She was surprised, even annoyed at herself. It seemed to her she had never really thought much of John Dexter, one way or another. He was but an incident, an episode. Yet here he was, transformed, actually disputing the sway of this new passion.

In her heart was a delight toward Carleton that thrilled her. But at the same time there was something that troubled, making her feel that this delight did not include everything. It was John Dexter.

At last she went to sleep, thinking as she dozed off of a big delightful world here, and a soft chastened one there; feeling that the former called aloud to her; caring not to hear the call of the other, but knowing none the less that it did call.

But on waking the next morning her first thought was of his arms about her, holding her to himself. The

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tangle of the night before, all the doubt and uncertainty, seemed to have vanished with the night. There was left no disturbing thought to mar her memory.

"I was simply silly," she concluded, glad that the next day was Sunday.

CHAPTER XIV

BUT Carleton was not at church Sunday. After she went into the choir for long she kept her eyes studiously fixed on her hymnal, fearing to raise them lest they should encounter his fixed upon her from some pew far back.

When she stood up to sing, she glanced nonchalantly over the top of the hymnal, and failing at first glance to see him, furtively searched the auditorium. But he was not there.

At the close of the service she was almost angry. At least she was spited. She had been absolutely sure he would be there. The ice on Hollaton was perfect, and everybody was going down. Besides, she had been certain——

She picked up *The White Silence*, which she was returning to Dexter, and went in search of him. She found him away over by the right exit. He had started home once, had got clear out of the building. But he had returned, and was now standing uncertain, as if still undecided what to do. At her approach he looked up eagerly, the quick flush of his face showing he fairly thrilled at her presence.

"I brought back the book, Mr. Dexter," she said, sweetly. "I enjoyed it all but the ending. Did you like the way it turned out?"

"The way it ended?" and all at once it was precisely as if his natural manner had been veneered over

with the old fustian bombast. "Bless me, if I know. I don't remember them more than a dozen years."

"It doesn't end right, anyway. But thank you for it."

"Don't mention it." Then drawing in his breath as if screwing up his courage, "What do you say to going over to Hollaton about the middle of the week? A lot of us are going, and thought you might as well go along."

Really, he put the question in this way to hide his own vast mortification in case she should refuse to go with him; but it made her feel as if there were, after all, nothing personal in the invitation, but that she was asked merely to make up a crowd.

It piqued her that this should be so, and her initial tendency was to decline to go except with one who really desired her. But she recalled that no one had seemed to desire her sufficiently to come and ask her.

"I should like it," she said.

"Be ready then. I'll call for you when we decide to start."

He carried The White Silence home with him, and directly after lunch started to read it through. He finished it late that night.

"I wish I had read it before giving it to her," he said as he sat thinking it over. "It doesn't end very well. But," he concluded irrelevantly as he laid it aside, "she might not have taken it at all if I had offered to give it to her."

He moved in his seat and drew a blank sheet toward him. He began scribbling upon it, his eyes no longer the bold, superior eyes of the boaster but the mystic

eyes of the dreamer. He wrote a line and checked the meter off on his fingers; wrote a second line and read the two aloud. But he shook his head.

"I can't do it," he muttered, despondently.

In her room in the old parsonage, Edith was looking over her great heavy sweater of Kelly-green with the becoming cap to match; and at the same time she looked at it with approval she bit her lip at the thought that John Dexter perhaps would be the only one there to see it.

"You could skate to China in that outfit," she mimicked with a little grimace, anticipating his probable greeting.

She had never said anything to him to let him know that she was sorry. She had decided that she really did not care if he was hurt. It was his own fault!

The next time she saw him after that morning in the Sunday school class she was glad she had so decided, for he had greeted her with his loud-voiced hyperbole in a manner that made her doubt he had ever felt the sting of her hostility.

But not the least of her irritation now, as she sat on the edge of the bed with the big green sweater on her lap, sprang from a knowledge which she would not admit even to herself, that there was something about him, unsuspected of himself, that was an unuttered condemnation of her.

Tuesday morning Mrs. Erksen called up and invited the Morgenthals down for dinner. Earl might come down from school, she explained; and with alacrity the invitation was accepted.

Edith hoped that Dexter might call that morning

for her, so that she might have an excuse for refusing to go to Hollaton with him. But he did not.

When the Morgenthals arrived everything was precisely as it should have been in the Erksen living room. The stove wore such a rich gloss that Mrs. Morgenthal regarded it with secret despair; the pile of the thick rag rugs stood up in mute testimony of the work of an efficient sweeper; the chairs were nicely placed with cushions freshly fluffed.

Mrs. Erksen was perfectly aware of each one of these items as she welcomed her guests. She knew everything was in perfect condition. For, as usual, she had got everything done she had planned to do, and she had planned for each thing that needed doing. She apologized for nothing: no apology was needed.

There was just one fly in the ointment, and that was Hope Erksen. He came in from the kitchen shortly after the guests had arrived, the morning mail in his hand. He walked serenely over to a seat near the stove and sat down to remove his arctics.

As he unsnapped a buckle, a mushy bit of snow fell down on the carpet. He pulled the arctic off by putting his hand under the heel and giving it a quick upward twist. When it came off, it fell from his hand and lay in a wet, crumpled heap on the floor.

Mrs. Erksen regarded this whole proceeding with lowering eyes, but she said no word. Even when he took the other off, and with a careless movement of the foot, shoved both over nearer the wall, she made no audible objection, although a dark, watery smear marked their course.

She doubtless found relief in the kitchen, for she

excused herself and went out there. When she called them out to dinner later, there was almost an air of mystery about her, as though in the back of her mind she was planning to set a trap for the unwary to walk into.

"Now, I am just going to pass the victuals and let you help yourselves," she said, vigorously after Dr. Morgenthal had returned thanks. "Just take off what you want."

"You don't have to urge us to do that, sister," the Doctor assured her, heartily. "We don't have to be persuaded when we come to your house."

The meat was passed first, a steaming, juicy loaf, and was quickly followed by the potatoes and corn which Mrs. Erksen had dried herself.

Then she hesitated for the barest fraction of a moment before passing a dish which sat near her. She picked it up then, with a glance at its contents, and sent it on its way.

She did not announce what it contained, but a glance served to make known its contents. They were parsnips, parsnips which had been most painstakingly peeled and boiled and fried in butter until they looked more than anything else like dainty strips of fried white fish with brown edging.

She watched the dish make its way up the table, watched while appearing to be busy with the duties of serving. She saw Earl take off a generous helping, and she held her breath while Dr. Morgenthal regarded the dish uncertainly.

But when he lifted out, not one, but two of the fragrant and tender slices, she assumed the attitude

of one who has been confirmed in a belief, but who remembers not to crow too soon.

When the dish reached Mrs. Morgenthal she glimpsed her husband's plate quickly, saw that it held a helping of the detested vegetable, and herself waited.

As usual, Dr. Morgenthal became loquacious as the meal proceeded. He spoke in a somewhat grandiloquent voice of the present social unrest, and at some length gave his own explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity, using the air he usually assumed when speaking exclusively to women.

He ended by a eulogy of Mrs. Erksen's ability as a cook. Whereupon she passed the dish that sat near her, for the second time, and saw with gratification that he took another helping.

"Anything that Sister Erksen prepares is worth a second helping," he remarked with a genial smile.

"I allus say as any victuals be good if cooked right," she answered him, insinuatingly.

"The parsnips are lovely, Mrs. Erksen," Mrs. Morgenthal said sweetly, albeit with a questioning glance at her husband.

"They certainly are," he replied, meeting her eyes blandly.

Dinner over, they repaired to the living room. "Take this chair, Doctor," Mrs. Erksen urged, solicitously. "It be easier than the others."

"Sister Erksen surely knows what I like." He smiled in appreciation as he took the seat.

"I know what a strain it must be to preach as you preach to us," with the deft implication that others might not appreciate this.

Here Hope Erksen leaned back comfortably in his chair and linked his fingers over his waist-line. There was a look of satisfaction on his face, which caused his eyes to twinkle merrily.

"'Minds me of a time durin' the war," he chuckled, his white moustache standing out raggedly. "Men was a bein' drafted right 'n left, 'n the price of subs was as high as fi'teen hundred dollars. Feller livin' here name o' Zeke Boles. Zeke was a wuthless lout, 'n couldn't ha' raised fi'teen hundred cents. But he was a goin' with one o' the puttiest gals as ever lived. Yes, sir, Minnie Latham was one o' the puttiest gals as ever lived: Tall 'n slender, with big blue eyes 'n jest enough git-up-and-go abaout her to set her off. 'N she was prouder'n a peacock o' Zeke. Funny haow them wuthless fellers allus gits the pick o' the gals!" he said suddenly, breaking off.

"Be ye goin' to have a garden comin' spring?" Mrs. Erksen inquired of Mrs. Morgenthal, causing her husband to look at her aggrievedly.

"I am not sure. Are we?" turning to the Doctor.

"We certainly are," at which Mrs. Erksen shut her lips firmly.

"Well, sir, old Zeke couldn't git a sub, 'n he knowed what that meant. Minnie was scart to death over him, but was prouder'n ever for all that. She said it was noble to fight for the country, 'n Zeke 'lowed modestly that 't wa'n't no disgrace. 'N then he was called. Soon as the call come, Minnie she went about fixin' up a party for him, invitin' everybody in good standin' 'n fixin' to do high honors. The boys all got together and buy Zeke a present, a big, open-faced silver watch,

'n a heavy chain to match, with an acorn charm on it. It cost heavy, but the boys as had to stay behind didn't mind havin' Minnie's gratitude bubblin' over toward 'em."

Here he stopped again, his eyes alight at the old memories, his ragged moustache dancing as he chuckled. He was enjoying the narrative as well as the others.

"How do you like Paxton by this time?" Mrs. Erksen again interrupted, herself not moved by the narrative.

"We love it," Mrs. Morgenthal assured her. Edith's eyes were fixed on Hope Erksen's face.

"Yes?" she prompted.

"Well, sir, the night o' the party come, 'n all the boys 'n gals was on hand. Zeke carried his honors modestly at first, sayin' it was nawthin' more'n a American citizen had ought to do, 'n now and then glancin' sheepish-like at the boys. Minnie, she walked around with him, 'n stood when he stood, 'n set when he set down, allus a smilin' and a blushin' like all the honors was hers as well. But as the evenin' wore on 'n everybody kep' a tellin' him what a wonder he was (the boys a lookin' at Minnie while they told him), he got to thinkin' that this here thing he was about to do was no small affair. He got to bowin' to the other gals 'n tellin' 'em it was a pleasure to die for the like o' them. He got to excusin' himself from Minnie 'n honorin' the other gals with his society. 'N Minnie, she blushed even more at this, 'cept that now 'n then she turned a little pale. Then young Abe French makes a fine speech 'n hands the big silver watch 'n chain with the acorn charm on it, over to Zeke as a token of our respect, lookin' at Minnie while

he did so. Zeke takes the watch 'n puts it in his pocket, 'n fastens the chain in his vest 'n buttons up his coat. He gets up 'n thrusts his right hand partly under his coat at the breast, 'n strikes a fine attitude. He clears his throat 'n allows that he will no doubt face many dangers; he might not ever come back 'n be with us again. But he is willin', he says. He is only doin' his duty in his own weak way. 'N he said if he died, he 'd die like a man! 'N then when he set down, he started talkin' with little Alice Yerkes, who was settin' on his right, 'stead o' talkin' to Minnie, who was on the other side of him. He got cooler 'n cooler to Minnie, 'n friendlier 'n friendlier with the other gals. 'N some of the boys says he acted like he didn't want to wait 'n say good-night to Minnie, but wanted to take little Alice home. That made the boys mad 'n they was goin' to use him rough, but they didn't, thinkin' he'd get what was comin' to him in the army."

He chuckled again here, then smacked his lips and squirmed in his seat. He was approaching the climax of his story, and it clearly turned out exactly to suit him.

"Well, sir, it was funny how Minnie took it. First she turned pale 'n looked ready to cry. 'N then she commenced breathin' hard 'n her big blue eyes got to lookin' like so much ice. When finally he come to say good-night in the new condescendin' way he had got into, she jest touched the tips of his fingers 'n nods her head in a cold little bow. That was all—no fuss like the boys was half expectin'. 'N then Zeke leaves for the army. He went with his grand manner, pre-

tendin' he was willin' to die. He kind o' got to hopin' toward the last that he would die in action—a soldier's death, he called it."

"To think of it!" Edith interrupted, stirred to a hot anger. "O, I just wish I could have got hold of him!"

"But wait," the old man said, waving his hand happily. "The best thing happened."

"What was it?" breathlessly.

"Well, sir, in a few days old Zeke come back! He come back with his head down 'n his tail between his legs," completely forgettin' himself in his delight at this turn of affairs.

"A deserter! I might have known it."

"No, he didn't desert. They wouldn't have him. He had bad lungs, 'n his heart was out of fix, 'n his teeth was bad, 'n there was somethin' wrong with his feet."

"O! And after all his airs," and Edith clapped her hands in delight at this clear evidence that a man reaps what he sows. "Wasn't that just too good for him! What did he do then?"

"He was humbler'n a whipped dog. He wrote Minnie a note, sayin' he was back, 'n now that he did not have to go to war, there was nawthin' further to stand 'twixt 'em."

"And what did she say?"

"She fires right back, 'n says if he ain't good enough for the army he ain't good enough for her, 'n that he needn't ever be comin' back to see her!"

"I just hoped she would do that!"

"But that ain't all. Young Abe French, he took

Minnie out behind a fast trotter he just got, 'n as they was drivin' along they see old Zeke.

"'Hello, Zeke,' Abe hollers out. 'Got the c'rect time about you, Zeke?'"

"'But Zeke he said nawthin', but only scowled at 'em and slunk on down the street. He finally throws the watch in Hollaton, they run on him so about it.'"

"'But Minnie! What became of her?'"

"'Naow, this here Abe French,'" he said with a crafty smile, "'it wa'n't the trotter he was primarily interested in, if he did let on that way—at first! It was Minnie. 'N he got her!'"

Mrs. Erksen sighed with marked relief, now the narrative was finished. It had no novelty for her; its charm had long since vanished. Her fear was that another might be started, and she hastened to forestall any such contingency.

"'How many scholars be in your class?'" she asked of Edith.

"'There are six or eight, depending on the weather,'" she replied, trying to simulate interest, but her mind was still visualizing another scene.

"'They be greatly pleased with their teacher.'"

"'I am glad.'"

They left not long after two, Edith going up by the Office for the mail while Dr. and Mrs. Morgenthal went directly home.

Hardly were they out of hearing of Edith when she gripped her husband's arm almost as if she would like to shake it.

"'Billy, what in the world made you eat those parsnips!'"

"Made me eat them!" lifting his brows in surprise. "I suppose it was because I liked them."

"But you will never eat them at home."

"Never eat them at home?" Then after pondering this a moment, "Now, I guess you are right," he said, wonderingly, as one making a discovery.

As on many previous occasions, Edith encountered John Dexter near the Office. He, it seemed, was just starting down the street toward his own home.

"Seems as if I run into you here about every time I see you," he greeted, as if there had been and was now no design in the encounters. "The big event is to be pulled off to-morrow. How does that strike you?"

"I—I guess it will be all right."

"About one, then. Give you time for dinner."

He walked down the street with her, talking in his usual manner of tumid exaggeration. She became more and more provoked with him, with herself, with everything, as she walked along beside him. If only he were not so utterly impossible; if only she were not passing judgment on her own likes and dislikes in going about with him! Yet how else could other people explain it?

She even smiled wryly at thought of the doubts that had assailed her on his behalf the evening of Carleton's last visit; smiled that she should ever have considered him a possible suitor! Then a new thought struck her, causing her to lift her head a little higher. Knowles Carleton—all right! If he did not care enough to come around, she could not be expected to sit about and wait for him. She would go to Hollaton with John Dexter, and she would learn to like him too!

CHAPTER XV

THERE were four couples in the party, and Edith and John Dexter were in front. In his bold and pompous manner he had declared that someone was needed to set the pace, and that he and Edith did not shrink from that task. Then with a laugh that insinuated there was perhaps a reason why each of the other couples desired to walk behind, they had set out.

As they walked briskly along over the snow that was white with the whiteness of clean paper, he in an indistinguishable gray and she looking prettily agile and competent in the big green sweater, the cap to match giving her a roguish look as well, he talked loudly of his skates, the just partly broken path, the severity of the winter, while her manner was at one time preoccupied, at another almost resentful.

But after a little the veneer of magniloquence fell away from him, leaving him a humble and somewhat embarrassed individual, having something he desired to say, but lacking in words and courage to say it.

Edith felt the change in him, felt it even before he spoke. She liked it. If only he might always be like this, so quiet and serious! Then the covert glances the others sometimes exchanged behind his back, and of which, when she was with him, she was painfully sensible, might not be called out.

"I have something I should like to say to you some

time before we go back," he ventured, avoiding her eyes.

In his very attitude there was something personal, something suggestive, that made her almost distressingly self-conscious, so strongly did it seem of a sudden to encompass them in a maze of private personality suggestion.

"Something about the art of skating?" she answered when he seemed to be waiting for a reply, reverting to their previous conversation.

"No, not that. It is something I want you to know."

"Then you didn't want me to know about skating?"

"Skating? O, to be sure," he said, hastily, annoyed that she should thus skirt the subject he had so momentarily in mind. "But this other thing is about you. I mean," he hurried on, "not just exactly to you, but how I feel."

For a moment she turned her head and looked at him, striving from his face to get the meaning his incoherent sentences failed to convey. But his flushed face revealed little; he would meet her questioning glance but for an instant.

"I don't understand," she said with a touch of sharpness.

"I will tell you later. I mean I will read—let you read it yourself."

"Very well." Then as the lake came suddenly to view, "Here we are! How wonderful the ice looks!"

"I say it does," he agreed, loudly, escaping from the embarrassing situation by covering himself with his veneer. "Sixty miles an hour will be conservative speed on that ice."

On the bank near the landing, there was a great pile of old rails whose purpose in that particular place was apparent. But a little time sufficed to kindle them into a crackling fire; and soon its blaze was licking up in wicked but warming glow.

Edith sat down on the low seat that had been fashioned near the fire while Dexter dropped down at her feet to fasten her skates. Daintily she put out her foot to him, and seeing it, as on another day, he marveled it was so small. Taking it in his hand, he adjusted the skate to it.

Looking up when he was through with the one, he found her watching the process interestedly, her brows slightly puckered in an anxious little frown.

"Now the other, and you will be harnessed."

She put the other out for him, the while she pressed the one to the ground, testing it. When he had fastened the second, but before he took his hands away, he spoke in a low, tense voice without looking up.

"I think you are the most wonderful woman in the world."

"I—what did you say?" she asked, so taken aback she thought she must have misunderstood him.

"I think you are the most wonderful woman in the world," he repeated slowly, lifting his eyes to her face.

"Thank you," she said, hastily. Then getting quickly to her feet, "I will go down and be practicing up while you get ready," she said.

While she gyrated aimlessly about on ice that resembled the clear hard plate glass of a show case she thought confusedly of what he had said, of how he sat there before her when he said it; and she tried to settle

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on precisely what he had meant her to understand from his words.

He joined her a moment later, coming up with a quick flourish; and even as he came up to her she felt herself enveloped anew in that atmosphere of intimacy with him, an atmosphere freighted with the suggestion of private personal matters that might concern only themselves alone, an atmosphere which simply would not allow an attitude of indifference or unawareness.

He smiled at her as he reached for her hands; while on her part she looked at him in an effort to show that she was unconcerned, but resenting it that this new seriousness of his could not be ignored but insinuated itself into her consciousness, compelling either a definite break with it or a strained awkward recognition.

In perfect unison of bodily movement they swung briskly across the lake, their skates swishing over the hard ice and etching on the blue surface the fanlike track of their parallel passage.

Edith glided forward with long confident strokes, putting her trimly shod feet down with quick firm certainty, now looking down at the ice, now throwing back her head with a little quickening of speed caused by sheer delight in the fine enjoyment.

For a little she forgot Dexter; forgot the insistence of this suggestion that emanated from him and encompassed her, forcing her to think of him, daring her to treat him with feminine weapon of evasion.

Then she glanced at him, prepared to look quickly away or to make light remark should he have sensed the complexion of her thoughts and be regarding her.

But his eyes were downcast, as if the motion of skating required his whole attention.

Yet she knew he was not wholly occupied with the movement of his body; knew the process was automatic with him, even as it was with her. Intuitively she knew his thoughts were of her.

She felt her superiority to him; believed that of the two she was the stronger. And believing this, she was angered that he should embarrass her with this awkward situation; that he should create it, and instead of making an effort to relieve it, should by his own strained and self-conscious silence actually prolong and intensify it.

She glanced at him again, and seeing he appeared unconscious of it, studied him curiously. Seen thus, his face did not have the same look as when animated by the old spirit of boastfulness. There was now a touch of strength about his mouth; a hint of something fine in the whole profile.

It occurred to her also that the firm pressure of his hands and the confident and unhesitating movement of his body as they whisked forward betokened a physique marvelously coordinated. Indeed, for the time being he seemed to have stepped completely out of his old self and to be moving along beside her as a man exceedingly fine of spirit who at the same time made a physical appeal as unique and unusual as it was strong.

He looked up suddenly and caught her eyes full upon him. He smiled, and noting it, she wondered that heretofore she had failed to recognize in this smile the unaffected expression of a nature whose strong desire was to be understood.

"I suppose you, like everybody else, must think I am a fool," he said to her.

"I do not," she answered, defensively. Then coloring, "I am sure I do not."

"Most people do," and he smiled ruefully. "I don't seem able to get before people right. If I am natural, they call me a fool; and if I try to be what they seem to want me, they say I am affected."

"That is not fair!" she declared, feelingly, goaded to his defense by the uncanny way he was uncovering her own thoughts of him, and fearing he might see the truth.

"Maybe not, but that is how it is."

"Tell me about yourself," she demanded suddenly, more than anything else, to change the conversation.

"Not now. There isn't much to tell any way. I want to tell you something else first."

"Yes?"

"Here is an envelope," he said, producing one from his pocket and handing it to her. "There is something in it I want you to read."

"Now?"

"Yes—no, when you get home," changing his mind. "There is plenty of time. It won't take you more than a year to read——" but catching himself he amended, "Perhaps you can read it better there."

His relapse, if only for an instant, into the old bombastic manner, did not escape her. It was manifest more by his physical expression than by his words. She marveled at it: one moment he was natural and unaffected with something fine about him; another,

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and he was the loud-voiced boaster, speaking with the old fustian bombast.

"I want you to understand," he said as if reading her thoughts. "With others, I have not cared so much, but I want you to understand."

With an expression on her face more of bewilderment than of satisfaction, she tucked the envelope into a pocket of her sweater.

"I will give it back when I have read it."

"No. It is yours," he said, quietly.

The note of quiet authority in his voice again made her think of him in the new role, very different and far removed from the individual she had once considered him.

With this thought, by some strange law of association, came memory of Knowles Carleton. She stood these two men up side by side in her mind, and compared them there. Again the old tangle reappeared to trouble her; again, on the one hand was the big bright world and on the other the soft and chastened world.

"Maybe we had better go back to the fire," he suggested.

Accordingly, they swung round in a wide circle and glided swiftly back over the ice. All about them was the cold beauty of healthful winter; almost a mile away was the fire on the bank, a spot of red and blue against the white.

On their approach they discerned that another group had arrived at the lake since their departure; and one member of this new group, at least, was not long in making himself known.

Knowles Carleton arose and waved his hat lustily. "Hello," he called. "See how fast you can make it."

They came toward the fire with quick stroke, and arrived out of breath but satisfied.

"It is wonderful!" Edith panted.

"I want you to meet Miss Matthews," Carleton said in the inane phraseology of introduction. "This is Miss Morgenthal," and for the first time Edith saw that the girl who sat on the low seat was a stranger to Paxton.

Miss Matthews was sitting rather stiffly on the low seat, her attitude one of bored hauteur. "Miss Morgenthal," she repeated after Carleton, with a chilly smile and a very slight inclination of her head.

"We have been here waiting for you," Carleton explained, jubilantly. "Thought you never would get back."

"Why don't you come out and skate!" Edith questioned him in surprise.

"I don't relish the—the practice," Miss Matthews answered for him, with a slight shrug of her shoulders.

"O, you don't?" Edith turned toward her with lifted brows.

"It is very violent and—masculine."

"Miss Matthews doesn't skate," Carleton interrupted, hastily.

"I have skated, Knowles," she corrected him, sweetly, "but it is not done any more."

"So many have quit because it makes their complexions runny," Edith explained further, laughing.

"Wish I had my skates," Carleton gloomed. "How is the ice?" as he went toward it.

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The other skaters had gone away from the fire and were to be seen zigzagging about over the lake. Only the three remained by the fire. Carleton went down and stepped out on to the ice. Edith joined him.

"You are some skater," he said, admiringly.

"Don't you skate?"

"Sure. But I didn't bring them. Didn't know I would come by this way or—that you would be here."

"I see."

"Now look here, Edith," he began, going up closer to her, and speaking rapidly. "I don't want you to think I am doing this the way it looks. I——"

"Knowles," came the cool voice from the bank, "do you recall little Bobbie Everet at school?"

"Bobby Everet? Sure!" his impatience giving way to interest. "What about him?"

"He is married."

"Married?"

"I saw him the other day. When you come up I shall tell you about him."

"I'll be up in a minute." Then turning again to Edith. "She is visiting down at our place. Went to school——"

"Excuse me," she cut in. "I see Mr. Dexter out there, so I think I shall join him."

"You don't think, Edith——"

"Hope you have a nice trip back home," she called over her shoulder.

He went moodily back to the fire, his attitude toward Miss Matthews uncertain. He was ready to go home at once, he told her. But she would not hear of it.

"It is lovely here. We must not go back yet."

In time the skaters began to come back in, sometimes singly, mostly two by two, coming happily, flushed by the exercise, with clear eyes and wholesome.

Dexter and Edith came in together. Her color was heightened; and still unlike his usual self, Dexter was quiet, the firm set of his jaw giving him the appearance of resolve. Seeing him coming in thus, and with Edith, Carleton for the first time regarded him and his presence there with a feeling that was not generous tolerance.

Edith would have avoided Miss Matthews, but that lady displayed no desire to be ignored. Picking her way with dainty care because of her high heels, she came over where Edith sat.

"So glad to have come over here," she said. "Your customs are so very interesting."

"Our customs——?"

"The queer old ways: Think of speaking to everyone you meet, and having dinner at noon, and letting the hired help stay in the house!"

"You are a guest at the Carletons'?" and her tone caused the other to color slightly.

"O, yes! Knowles and I are old friends. We have so many things to talk over."

"He seems very interested," and she turned indolently to look at him where he stood out on the ice, talking to Dexter.

"Knowles is a dear boy. So impulsive! And when he wants anything, he wants it so quickly. Don't I know!" she ended with a soft caressing little laugh.

"Do you come to visit him very often?"

"O, dear no! But he has been so busy. I had so

many letters asking me to come that I just felt I had to."

"I have heard Margaret speak of you, now that you mention it," and the remark caused Miss Matthews to look at her quickly, as though she would discover exactly how much she knew.

"Margaret is a dear! I wanted her to come along this afternoon. But Knowles—as I say, Knowles is selfish."

Here Knowles reappeared.

"Too bad I didn't bring my skates," he repeated, clearly put out. "But maybe we can get down here some other time."

"Isn't it about time we were going, Knowles? You were to take me back the long way, you remember," looking at him fondly.

"Sure, I know. Say!" he spoke impulsively to Edith. "We can take you to town with us. Always room for another in the cutter."

"Thank you, but I came with Mr. Dexter."

"So glad to have met you," Miss Matthews said as she put one foot in the sleigh. "Sorry you have to walk all that horrid distance, but perhaps you are used to it. Good-by."

"See you later," Knowles said with a flourish as the horse started.

On the way back to town Dexter and Edith were behind, walking easily, he with her skates and his own thrown over his shoulder and she, hands free, swinging along with the boundless energy that seemed forever in reserve.

The conversation was general but gay, he keeping

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to his newer self and not once reverting to the old, speaking with an insight exceptionally keen, and with a quiet but eager interest. Indeed, he seemed much older than she had thought him. She became curious as to his exact age.

"Tell me," he said once, pointing to a great sycamore that loomed up white and cold ahead of them, "tell me what you see in that tree."

"See in the tree?" she repeated, responding, as she always found it necessary to do, to this new mood of his in like vein. "Well, I see first a great big body that is wonderfully strong."

"But that has feeling—that can be hurt," he added, eagerly.

"It would hurt it to be shoved in a hot stove and have the door locked behind it," she said slowly, remembering.

"Yes, yes. To have the door barred, so if it tried to get out there would be no way to open it. And if it should beat against the side, the hot metal would sear it."

"Don't!" she shuddered. "It is awful. I think of the first breath it takes when it gets in there."

"And has to breathe the flames."

"Do you feel it?"

He nodded; and then it was she knew that never before had she felt such companionship with any man. She understood him; she wanted to talk to him more. She wanted to compare other of her feelings about which she had never spoken with his own.

"But I think more about the other side," he continued the conversation, smiling now at her. "It is

not broken and bound and burned, but free out in the great air, and puts forth its strength and reigns."

"That's better," she exclaimed; and they exchanged glances, understanding.

He left her at her door, handing her skates to her with a smile, still the new and quiet self. Going in, she hastily threw off her wraps and went up to her room. She opened the envelope.

Her face fell at what she drew out—two sheets, each only partially filled. The content of the writing was not what she had expected.

But she read the one sheet; then putting it aside, picked up the other and read it. Having finished it, she again took up the first and reread it.

Her eyes became dreamy, as if she were visualizing elusive scenes, existent only in desire. When at last she arose, she put the sheets back in the envelope and tucked it into her breast. Carrying it there, she went below.

CHAPTER XVI

SUPPER was long since over at the Erksen home. The dishes were washed and put away, the hot-water tank on the range replenished; and feeling that all was done that needed to be that day, Mrs. Erksen had gone into the living room and taken up her evening's knitting.

It was too dark to see anything outside, so she did not sit in the bay. Rather she drew her chair up nearer the stove and sat so the light from the lamp should be at her back. She did not intend to lose her sight as so many had—by carelessness!

Hope Erksen sat near the stove also, but much nearer than she, for he "took" more heat than she did. Often for an hour or more after supper he would sit thus by the stove, occupied with nothing in particular. More frequently, it is true, he went upstairs where he might smoke; but often he sat down here without going up—perhaps because he had forgotten to take up any wood!

But this evening he was occupied. He had Timothy on his lap. Timothy was Hope Erksen's kitten. Mrs. Erksen had two cats, the long-haired Angora, which usually slept on the pillow in the corner, and the bob-tailed Manx, that did not care much for the house, but preferred to roam at large and alone.

But Timothy was peculiarly Hope Erksen's. He was a Zanzibar, and although at this time but a kitten compared with old Manx, he nevertheless gave promise

of wonderful size and markings: Even now the black stripes ran down his back and curved in beautiful fish-hooks on his lower body.

Hope Erksen had found him as a tiny kitten, seemingly deserted by his mother, had brought him in and fed him with his own hands, and now Timothy was responding to this treatment and showing his gratitude by a marked preference for his master, seeking him out and preferring him to anyone else, frisking about over him, and spitting him playfully with soft paws.

He lay on his lap now, turned comfortably up on his back, and pretending to bite the old finger that was tickling him. He opened his small mouth, drawing back his lips wickedly, but the wickedness was not realized in the bite.

"Naow, naow, Timothy. You are gettin' purty sharp!" said Hope Erksen, looking down at him.

And as he looked, mischief came into his old eyes. He chuckled at what he thought. And with Timothy in his hand, he went out to the kitchen, reappearing shortly with a bit of paper and a string in his free hand.

He turned Timothy on his back again, and making a sack of a piece of the paper, tied it on his foot. This he continued to do until each foot wore its little paper shoe.

Mrs. Erksen noted all, though she held her peace. The only appreciable effect the procedure had upon her was a slight quickening of the already flying needles.

"Naow, see haow you walk when shod," Hope Erksen said as he put the kitten down.

In his usual sprightly manner, Timothy jumped from his favorite seat. But alighting, at once he began to act strangely. He fell completely over, and lying on his back, shook all four feet desperately in the air. He attempted to drag himself erect, only to bounce like a rubber ball, and shake himself both on the ascent and on the descent.

Hope Erksen was following every contortion, and missing not one. He was laughing silently, chuckling down in his throat. He lifted a hand and slapped it down on his knee. Mrs. Erksen appeared not to notice, albeit her needles flew ominously.

He removed the sack from one of Timothy's hind feet; and the cat then gyrated round and round, propelling itself backward by the unhindered foot.

He took the paper off the other hind foot; and at once Timothy began to back away with great haste, going like a crawfish. This motion, in particular, seemed to move Hope Erksen. Both hands he lifted and slapped down on his knees, humping up as he did so.

Finally the sack was removed from a front foot, and then Timothy walked, but with slight confidence, now giving way and falling, as a horse that steps on a sharp stone, now leaning over sidewise and shaking the fettered foot in the air.

The cumulative effect was too much for Hope Erksen. Perhaps he could have stood one act, or maybe two. But the third caused the explosion. He laughed in his little jerky way until his ragged white moustache fairly trembled.

Then Mrs. Erksen became active. She laid her

knitting aside with an emphatic gesture, and got to her feet, eyes snapping fire.

"Hope Erksen! I fit bringing this cat into the house, but now it be here, no one can abuse it!" Then to the cat, "Come here, Timothy, and I'll take it off."

Take it off she did, but Timothy feared to trust human goodness further. He slunk hastily out into the kitchen, where he might safely hide his shame and be safe from further insult.

There was silence in the room he left, Hope Erksen looking rather guilty and taking his reproof as justly bestowed, while his wife resumed her knitting and her thoughts.

"You mind Thad Kline's pa?" she asked after a time.

"Theodore, wa'n't it? Do I mind him! Sure I do. He married Myrtle Alley, f'm over to Hassie's Corners."

"'T wa'n't Myrtle. Myrtle was the second. He took Mamie."

"You got 'em mixed. Mamie married that Bain Ridge feller—what was his name? Matthews. John Matthews!"

"John Matthews? Where did they live?"

"To Bain Ridge! Lived out there all their lives."

"That makes it, then," she said with a sigh of relief. "This Miss Matthews as is visitin' the Carletons says to me to church her grandma was an Alley, and lived in here somewheres."

"Mamie Alley married old John Matthews. You mind he owned that two hundred and sixty acres that laid down in the bottom there below Bain Ridge. 'N

his son, Caleb, married an Ackerman gal, Leeta. That her ma?"

"Ackerman was the name. I was tryin' to figure it from Myrtle."

Here there was a knock at the door, and Hope Erksen went to answer it, while she gathered up some yarn that had fallen from her lap. It was Dr. Morgenthal.

"Come in, come in!" Hope Erksen greeted cordially. "See anything of old Guiraud?"

"I saw him. He is coming down right away."

"We'll go on up. He knows the way, I guess."

With a brief greeting to Mrs. Erksen, Dr. Morgenthal went on upstairs, leaving her standing nonplussed and greatly annoyed that she had not known of this arrangement long enough beforehand to make what improvement she dared in the attic.

Have you ever been a silent listener to the unhurried conversation of old men? Have you seen them in their favorite attitudes, sitting for example like Hope Erksen now, with his feet thrust out before him, his head resting against the back of his chair and his hands folded over his waistline? or like Dr. Morgenthal, whose head was fallen forward until his chin rested on his breast, having slid down just a trifle in his chair?

Perhaps you recall that the conversation of old men is rather fitful save when a subject relating to dates, places, or ages, in the past is up, when it can be somewhat vehement.

But most always it is of the past. The old days far back seem perpetually bright as with a morning

sun that sets not; and the incident back there has an imagery far more vivid than the very recent.

Or the talk may be philosophic. Even the most active man inclines to draw conclusions from his experience; tends to compare the universe as it is with the one he would construct if he had the power; does this, that is, when he gets to be an old man.

And here is a fact that is very suggestive: the world these old men would construct is always a spiritual world; a world where greater emphasis is given to the things that are not seen than to the visible.

The man of middle life may be noted, and his concern is for the tangible values; but this same man grown old and wise discounts these values and for satisfaction turns more and more to the things that are within.

So it was with these three old men. They spoke often of the world as it is and compared it with the one they would construct, but ever the world of their dreams was a world dominated by the spirit of humanity.

But on this evening the mood did not seem on them for philosophizing. They seemed inclined to turn to that other topic of interest to the old—the far gone years when they faced life with the beautiful anticipation which is the glory, even as it is the mystery, of old age.

Old Guiraud sat up in his chair, being too round of figure to slouch. He drummed on his knees with his fingers, letting his mind slip back over the years.

“You will pardon me. I speak of ze personal. But one time I go back to ze old home. I had been away for many years. And when I make ze retour—ze,

what you say?—ze visit, what did I find? There was my mother in ze house; she was washing ze dishes. I hear them make ze rattle as I walk up. It was evening, ze close of a warm day. I had walked ze three miles from ze station to ze old farm. There was my father, sitting out in ze shade of ze house, puffing his pipe and looking off toward ze east, his eyes on ze distant places. It was all vari peaceful! My father discern my approach, and he look again, uncertain. Then he jumps up with his face glowing, ‘O, mother!’ he cries, ‘Fustel is come, Fustel is come!’ But my speerit, it was not good,” he continued, gently. “I had come from ze city where I hear much about ze cleanliness and sanitation and care of ze body. I notice that my father is dirty, and my heart, it hardens. Ze noise in ze kitchen stopped, and my mother, she runs out and takes ze one look and holds out her arms to me. I goes toward her, but looking at her I descry that she was not brushed up, and I felt hard inside. She puts her arms about me, and turns up her face to kiss me like I was again ze leetle boy. But when I see her teeth, that they need brushing ze new way they had, I shoved her away and says, ‘Mère, you should go and wash ze—ze dents!’ ”

When he finished there was complete silence that none cared to break. Then, still sitting up rather stiffly in his chair, he continued:

“Brothers, since that day I have been a rich man; I have had ze célébrité. But never a time but I would have given it all up, if I could only go back to my mother and make it up to her.” Then after a moment, “You had many funerals this year, Doctor?”

The Doctor sat with his head fallen forward, thinking. He barely nodded in answer to this question, knowing it was more the result of a train of thought than a request for information.

"That thing, brothers," he said, "is one I can never get over. How I must have hurt my parents, catching them up with my thoughtlessness when they were rushing toward me in love! My father was a minister, as I have said. It was when I came home from college on a vacation that I went with him to one of his appointments. We were to stay all night at a place; and in the evening got to singing the old hymns. I had been studying the twenty-third psalm in a Bible class in school, and I wanted to air my knowledge of it: I was hoping he would call on me to lead devotionals, so I could expound the psalm. But after singing, 'O Love that wilt not let me go,' he stopped and had prayer. I can see now, how in his direct and simple way he had caught the spirit of the moment, and how he did the thing most delicately and at precisely the proper time. But then I could think of nothing but that he had circumvented my desire to air my knowledge. And so I had my say, directly he had finished. 'I see you don't use the Bible in your devotionals,' and I said it so it cut. 'We should like to hear anything you would care to read,' he answered quickly; and I aired what little I knew. It doesn't seem like so much, told this way. But it was the way he looked at me—timidly, almost frightened, with a great desire to conciliate me; fearing that I had learned things in school that he perhaps did not know. Like you, brother, I wish I could see him now and explain."

Hope Erksen had listened to all this sympathetically. There had been, once or twice, a mournful droop to the corners of his mouth, as though his own mind had its store of remorseful memories.

But it was not in his nature to brood over the inescapable. He much preferred the brighter wares in the storehouse of his memory. Consequently after a sufficient interval had elapsed to show his respect for the others' feelings, he hitched his chair up nearer with a sly chuckle.

"Minds me of a time in the war," he said, his eyes atwinkle. "Feller name of Apps Beesley was called, 'n had to go quick. 'N he left his gal in a huff, seemin' to blame her for his havin' to go 't all. He acted like she had sent him 'n was glad he was soon to be riddled with bullets.

"But when he got away from her 'n down at the camp he was sorry he had acted the fool like he had. He got to broodin' over the way he must ha' hurt her.

"'Doggone, boys,' he sighed one day, 'I must a nigh kilt that gal.'

"He got to sayin' this so much that the boys begin to wag him about it. 'Why don't you write to her, Apps, 'n tell her,' they says.

"'I thought o' that, boys,' he answers, sad and hopeless, 'but 't ain't no use. I gotta see her 'fore I can make up proper.'

"To see him mopin' round, you'd a thought he was a ruined man. He got to sayin' he understood now how Peter must ha' felt when the cock crowed 'n he remembered he had been faithless.

"'N then the war broke, 'n he went home. 'Boys,

the first thing I do I'm goin' to right this great wrong I ha' done,' he says.

"But the gal, she didn't seem to be demandin' any explanations, but come to meet him, whirlin' like a top.

"'Fergive me, Nan,' he implored, speakin' brokenly. 'I am sorry for what I've done!'

"'Fergive you for what?' she asks, lookin' at him.

"'For the brutal way I cut you before leavin',' he says, taken aback some. He had talked like he thought she had been there eatin' her heart out all the time he had been gone.

"'Fie, fie, Apps!' she laughs at him. 'I knowed that it was jest that you did not want to go—that 'n a case o' the swelled head!'

And he stopped here, leaning back still further in his chair, his eyes alight with his own thoughts. After a little he said, but somewhat gently, "It helps sometimes to think that the people we have not treated right knowed a right smart."

His attitude had its effect. There was a noticeable abatement of the emotional tide; the atmosphere of the room became more wholesome, more normal.

"Where iss leetle Phillips?" old Guiraud asked at last.

"The boy's sick," and now Hope Erksen did appear concerned. "I don't know what it is. The little feller ain't able to be abaout any more."

"I am sorry for that."

"Go to see him, Doctor," the old man said eagerly, as if grasping at any straw that might be of assistance. "Perhaps you can help him, some way."

CHAPTER XVII

O THE poor girl!" Edith ejaculated, sympathetically.

"I feel more like sayin', that ornry man!" Sally Bay declared with feeling. "Vic Kline to run off and leave the best girl we ever had here as a teacher! That girl's smart. And so purty! I see her one night when she stayed with my Hallie. She had took her hair down and was standin' before the glass combin' it. It be a yard long, and jest like so much silk.

"It makes me fightin' mad when I think of all she has had to suffer. I don't pity Vic Kline any, though law! he needs it, marryin' that woman. But he'll only reap what he has sowed."

"You mean to say, Sally Bay," Mrs. Erksen asked, deliberately, as though she did not want to believe such a terrible thing until forced to do so by irrefutable testimony—"do you mean that that girl be goin' to leave here and go home?"

"I mean jest that. First comes the report from the scholars. They says she be losin' all interest in the school work, and that when no one is around——"

"I know," Mrs. Erksen cut her short, impatiently. "But about her goin' to leave——?"

"Yes," continued Mrs. Bay, not to be interrupted. "The students reports that she be losin' all interest in the work. Then comes a letter from York State

addressed to her. It was in Vic's writin'. And then right off she gives notice that she has resigned."

"What else could she do?" Edith sympathized. "Right here in town, and the shower and all. It put her in an awful place."

"I believe," Mrs. Erksen said, looking out of the window. "Ain't that her comin' down the street now?"

Three pairs of eyes looked up the hill and rested on an easily recognizable figure coming down the street. A capable, well-set-up figure; a girl of very dark hair and eyes, dressed in a stylish blue suit and carrying a neat tan bag.

"It be," Sally breathed. "As I live!"

"The car's due in ten minutes," Mrs. Erksen said.

"I wonder if she could be leaving now?" This from Edith.

"Of course she be. We're losin' her."

Miss Barbour came on, stepping lightly. The bag seemed to bother her not at all, so easily did it swing from her hand. To have seen her one would not have guessed that she had loved, been wooed, and then deserted.

"She keeps her head up!" Sally Bay exclaimed, admiringly. "You don't catch her droopin'. But poor thing! She's tryin' to hide what is in her heart."

Soon the car gave its colorless toot, drew into the station, stopped, discharged and took on passengers, and pulled out. Miss Barbour had got on.

"She's gone," Sally murmured.

Silence for a moment, then she began again.

"There is another man in this town," she said, with

the quick change of subject characteristic of the nervously energetic. "Another man as don't deserve much 'tention, and that's John Dexter. A white-haired rabbit he is. He don't do nothin' day in and day out but blow, blow, blow."

"You be wrong there, Sally Bay," Mrs. Erksen contradicted, severely. "John Dexter's blow is more put on than real. If you knowed him better, you would understand that."

"I see him yesterday, walkin' round and blowin'. I don't want to understand his kind."

"You are right," Edith agreed, unexpectedly. "He is not one you would want to understand."

"Law now, you don't say!" Sally exclaimed, evidently taken aback by this unexpected agreement.

"I don't care," Edith flared, the old intolerable tangle again asserting itself and goading her unbearably. "I mean it."

Had she but known it, it is the things we don't mean that we find it necessary to assert so vehemently. When we actually mean a thing it sometimes never occurs to us to mention it; it is a part of the scheme of things, like Sunday or Christmas or death.

It is what we don't mean that we have to convince ourselves of by vigorously asserting it. Indeed, it was precisely because she did not believe what she said that Edith was so positive in saying it.

Underneath John Dexter was a gentleman, and she knew it. Not only that, but the gentleman in him appealed to her so strongly as occasionally to compel her to him against her will.

But she did not want it to be so. But again—can

we place our affections where we will, or do they not run here and there even against our volition?

Yes, it was coming to that, and Edith was fighting against it. It was coming to the place where she felt growing within her a deep unbidden affection for this man, that threatened, should it continue, to sweep everything before it.

It was nothing mysterious at all. He had seen her on every possible occasion; his thoughtfulness had met her everywhere. And while he assumed indifference on many occasions, she saw through it all to his heart.

But the other thing seemed so desirable! Knowles Carleton loved her, and his love was so open and beautiful. It kindled all her idealism. Why couldn't she go on with him without this other thing? . . .

"You ought not to talk that way, Edith," Mrs. Erksen reproved her.

"I know I oughtn't!" she said, wretchedly. "But I—O, I don't care what you think."

Sally Bay looked at her searchingly, the piercing expression of her face enhanced by her keen, sharp features. She looked away, then eyed Edith again. Finally she shot a triumphant glance at Mrs. Erksen with the I-told-you-so expression of one who has proved her point in a controversy of long standing.

Something of the significance of this look must have struck Edith, for she glanced quickly from one woman to another, sensing with feminine accuracy the meaning of each face.

"O, it is not that!" she cried, agitatedly. "It is not that. I just don't——"

"Uncle Hi comin' up the street," Mrs. Erksen interrupted, evenly, deftly steering the conversation along new lines.

Edith did not know whether she was grateful for the interruption, as turning attention from her, or whether she was annoyed because it prevented her from making a full explanation. She so wanted to explain just how it was.

But the subject was not brought up again, and before long she arose to go. She walked up the street, her head held prettily on one side, her coat falling about her loosely, a picture of wholesome and out-reaching womanhood. The deep brown of her eyes caught the light of the southern sun and refracted it in bright rays.

She hummed a little tune as she walked, keeping step to her own humming. For she had forgotten her anxiety to explain things, forgotten as one forgets who is so busied with her own pleasant dreaming that she cannot long be annoyed.

She went into the Office after the mail. A letter had come for her which she was so eager to read that she opened it at the desk and scanned its pages.

While she was standing there reading hurriedly, she heard voices in the room back, and one of them she recognized. John Dexter was speaking.

"You can say what you please," he was saying, loudly, "that old horse is no good. He has a whiteoak leg with a knot hole in it; his eyes are nothing but two glass marbles, and if you would hitch him to a flea he couldn't pull it."

At this there was much laughter and some little

jeering. Then some one made a remark which was inaudible to Edith.

"You will have to grow some before you can do it," Dexter replied, boastfully.

Still more laughter, and inaudible words spoken in a bantering tone, greeted this remark.

"Yes, he did!" Dexter disputed. "Any old day! Why, I——"

But Edith did not hear more. A feeling near akin to nausea came over her. A desire to get out into the free air, to shake from herself forever all trace of this man's acquaintance, came over her.

But he overtook her before she had gone far and fell into step beside her. It was the first time they had met alone since the day of the skating party, and for him this time was not auspicious.

Edith disliked his boastfulness; she disliked the loud way in which he sang his own praise, or in which he discussed any subject that might come up.

At sight of him she imagined into his mouth the words she had just heard him utter, and in doing so visualized him as he must have stood there, surrounded by the derisive group, boasting, "blowing," as Sally Bay had said.

"Do I look like a blind leader of the blind?" he greeted her.

"What do you mean?" she asked, noncommittally.

"I have been down leading old Todi around most of the day," he explained. "He has gone blind at last. Must be a queer feeling," he ended, shuddering.

"O, the poor man! Is he totally blind?"

"Can't see a thing. He wants to be led around till

he gets the locations fixed in mind. Makes your flesh crawl to lead him to the well and hear him count the steps—one, two, three, four.”

“But what will Mrs. Todi do?”

“She just shuts her lips and clenches her hands and says it is no more than she had been expecting. It is not a very happy place to be,” he finished, seriously.

For the moment she forgot that he was the man she had heard speaking in the Office. He was now so wholly different as to be another person. Again he was the man of delicate sensibilities and sympathetic attitude toward life.

It struck her suddenly that her presence was the cause of this transformation. When with others he was the old, hateful self; when with her, remarkably sensitive and fine.

Added consequently to the feeling of disturbed self-consciousness that usually came upon her when she was with him as this new person, came now a glow of pride that her presence was sufficient to work such a wholesome transformation.

“Tell me why you change so much,” she demanded on the heels of this thought, with a little confidential turning toward him.

“You are the cause,” he answered, quietly, seeming to understand her perfectly. “You make me forget everything but—what I am.”

“But why—why are you that other——”

“It is a queer tale,” he said, still quietly, not a little puzzled himself. “But some way, when I was little and got to talking about the things I thought—about the spirit in the tree, for instance, or the old giant

that gets under Hollaton and stirs it to a fury," turning to her eagerly to make sure she understood, "the boys would say I was crazy. They seemed to be indifferent to all these things. They did not understand them, and they wanted me to ignore them too. Well, a boy can't stand for his gang to laugh at him. So I acted the way I thought they wanted me to—I bragged and boasted and covered all these thoughts up in that way, so they couldn't find anything to jeer at. But I guess I must not have done it very well, after all. I guess if it is your nature to be one thing, even though it may make you seem queer, you will be queerer if you try to be anything else. I went too far the other way, and they laughed still more; and thinking I hadn't gone far enough, I went still further," he ended, bitterly.

"Yes?" she prompted, herself understanding him and struck by the naturalness of the explanation.

"I really never thought much about it, only to be a little self-conscious and halfway avoiding being with the boys until—until you came. Then I understood that all that was distasteful to you. O, you need not deny it," as she made as though to contradict him. "It was part of my real self that I could understand people; I just knew what they thought some way.

"Then I got to thinking over it, to trying to be myself, no matter if I should appear queer. Do you know," he protested, abruptly, "I just feel the whole world—I should like to put my hand on that tree and just feel over it. And that bottom there," waving his hands toward the old bottom that stretched off toward the distant Morrow, "It talks to me; it is

sober and sad and mournful! But when I started to say things like that," he continued in calmer tone, "the boys laughed and said I was crazy. But you—you make me feel it is all true."

Something within her responded to this attitude of his that made poetry of the universe; the old personality suggestion that emanated from him with its vague hints enveloped her anew; and added to all was the singing of her own heart that it was herself that brought out these beautiful thoughts in this man.

She did not shrink from the old bombast now; rather, pity for him that he should have to assume it as a protection came over her. For even in her experience had come knowledge of the merciless suppression by society of the unusual; even in her span had she observed nature's love of the average as expressed in hostility toward the exceptional.

"O, I think it is splendid that you could express yourself at all! That the thing had not died in all these years; that you had kept it alive."

"But you awakened it."

"I am glad," she answered, softly, thrilled now by the note of humble gratitude in his voice.

Dr. Morgenthal turned the corner and espied them. "Why, hello, children," he greeted. And because he liked for her to accompany him, Edith left Dexter and went with her father.

"Where are we going?"

"Down to see Uncle Hi," he said, laughing. "He has something he wants to show us."

Uncle Hi evidently had. He was ready for them, conducting them to the back of the lot to his henhouses.

"Hwi, hwi, hwi," he chuckled. "The only difference twixt hens and women is hens grow their feathers natural, while women kill a bird and get theirs artificial. There's old Rosetta, now, growin' sour and dryin' up 'cause no one's good enough to 'sociate with her. You can see how hard her eyes has got these last few months. I'll bet she's a thinkin' how the others is standin' in awe of her, when fact is they've forgot all 'bout her. And there's old Emma, bein' frank when she only wants to saw somebody. Ever notice," he continued with a sly glance over his shoulder, hopelessly confusing his comments on chickens with his deductions about people, "ever notice the frank ones never is frank about sayin' nice things? It's only when it's ornery."

He held out in his hand a short nubbin of corn, and the chickens pecked it, pecking his fingers as well and hopping about over him.

"Hwi, hwi, hwi! But the one I want to show you now is old Molly D. Molly D. never is sure of anything. She's allus fearful she's made a mistake, or ain't goin' to do the right thing! Used to call her Doubt, 'cause she was allus uncertain what to do or het up over what she had done. But when I got to know Molly Denny, livin' down to Shady Lane, I changed her to Molly D."

Molly D., like the others, was of pure white stock; but unlike the others in a certain particular she undoubtedly was. She was in a fever of uncertainty. She ran toward the old man, seemingly with intent to peck at the nubbin, only to stop midway and hang for a moment in doubt. Should she go on, or had she not

better, after all, return and finish what she was about? was the question she might have been asking herself as she hung there in perplexity.

Return she did, to scratch wildly for a minute or two and hurry back again. And as she went first in one direction and then in another, she seemed to grow distressed over her previous uncertainty, as if fearing she had bungled things dreadfully.

"Notice her," Uncle Hi directed, himself regarding her intently. "If that ain't Molly Denny I don't know my name. Molly Denny gits a cut o' steak for dinner and then worries 'cause she didn't plan fer ham and aigs. She gits a dress up to the store, and wants to take it back 'cause she just knows it is not what she had in mind; and if they take it back, she wishes she'd a kep' it a few days more just to make sure! Way I come to know her was when she gets a silver fillin' and cried 'cause she hadn't got a gold one. Look at her!"

For Molly D. had jumped up on the roost, and was looking on up in distress. She jumped up higher, only to turn and look back down, as if thinking the perch she had left might, after all, have been better than the one she was on.

"She don't have no reg'lar nest," he continued, contemptuously. "Can't make up her mind to which one she wants, but lays now here, now there."

"Poor thing!" said Edith, thinking.

"I guess so," conceded Uncle Hi, grudgingly. "I guess she's to be pitied 'cause she was born that way. But that don't make her any nicer."

Again Dr. Morgenthal laughed, struck as on pre-

vious occasions, by the naturalness of Uncle Hi's descriptions. Molly D. undoubtedly acted as his explanations would suggest.

"Have you any more?" he asked, curiously.

"All o' them," said Uncle Hi, rising. "Some day I'll show you the others."

Dexter, knowing where they had been, greeted them as they went by. He was out near the sidewalk, working around a big maple.

"Soon be sugaring time," he said as they came up.

"Do you tap these trees?"

"Sometimes. But we tell from them when it is time to go to the bush."

"I hope I get to see the 'sugaring off' somewhere. I have heard so much about it," Edith said, eagerly.

"What chickens did you see to-day?" Dexter asked, curiously.

"Molly D., if you know her," the Doctor answered.

"I know them all," Dexter replied, seriously. "In many things Uncle Hi has been my teacher. He has taught me a lot about people. In many things I think he knows more than anyone I know."

"I don't doubt it at all."

"But who was his teacher?" Edith puzzled.

"He has learned from life—where people got their knowledge in the beginning."

CHAPTER XVIII

UP in her room Edith fluttered like some radiant beautiful butterfly, trying to get the effect of her party gown in its entirety, noting with glowing approving eyes the appropriateness of each of Mrs. Morgenthal's deft arrangements, the while the fragrance of her whole lovely young womanhood threw out its elusive allurements.

"I can never get tired of it," she exclaimed, happily. "I like it better every time I have it on."

"It was worth all we gave for it," Mrs. Morgenthal agreed, lifted out of herself by this vision of loveliness.

"I believe they will like it," she sighed, ambiguously.

"Of course they will."

At the same moment, down in a finely appointed room of the old Carleton home, Miss Matthews, deftly making a little trough of thumb and forefinger, drew them over her eyebrows with a circular motion calculated to make them perfectly smooth. This done, she added a touch here and patted her waist lightly there, while she surveyed the total effect.

"I believe everything is all right," she said at last with an air of satisfaction. "But I will stay up here and go down a little late."

But—and this would have been a surprise, alike to Edith and to Miss Matthews—in another room just across the hall Margaret Carleton was dressing with a care and anticipation approaching their own.

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When she had finished she stood forth somewhat pale, just a little timidly, but with blue eyes softly aglow and with her whole personality expressive of a beautiful idealism.

This was evidently to be no commonplace evening.

Some time later, in the great, low-ceilinged living room of the Carleton home, Edith sat animatedly before the fire, joyous over this party that had broken into her week and given her the chance to be out and with others, which to her was life.

Her gown left bare a square of the soft velvet of her breast, from which her neck curved in delicate lines up to the tip of her firm little chin. Her dark hair gave added richness to the already glowing complexion, whose articulate loveliness was enhanced by the deep and expressive brown eyes.

Carleton was standing a little to the front and at one side of her, alive to her loveliness and striving to appropriate her to himself by some eager mental transference. His very voice as he spoke to her betrayed his headlong desire.

Indeed, he made no effort to conceal this desire, but like some old Norseman who was more inclined to seize and carry off his heart's wish than to bother with the niceties of convention, he stood there with desire so manifest that one seeing him would not have been much surprised to see him pick her up and run away with her.

Across the room John Dexter was talking to a small group, but frequently his glance wandered over to the fireplace and rested first upon Edith and then, his expression both that of a man measuring an opponent

and of one hoping against intuition, lifted to Carleton and studied him.

"But sugaring is not the only good thing about spring here," Carleton was saying, his smile open and ingenuous.

"What is the other thing?" Edith smiled up at him.

"Spring is a good time to get married."

"And are you considering that?" she asked, indolently, while she looked in the direction of the one in whose honor the party was being given.

"I would if I could get the girl in the notion," he averred, the banter leaving his tone somewhat.

"And won't she consent?"

"She? Say, there is nothing to that. I thought we settled all that over at the lake."

"You are very sure of yourself."

"I don't mean to be like that," he hastened, seriously.

"I meant I had quit thinking about your being mad because of—her."

"And why should I be mad?"

"Why, because—Now I have balled it up again. Every time I say a word it is the wrong one. But—you know what I am driving at, don't you?"

"Then I know more than you have told me."

"You do that, don't you?"

"What about?"

Miss Matthews came over at this point, came in a manner rather haughty, yet purposefully smiling and affable. Coming up with a little flourish she spoke banteringly, shaking her finger at them with an air of mock reproval.

"My dears! Are you going to spend the whole

evening over here? What very interesting things some people must find to talk about!"

"Sure we are interested," Carleton assured her. "And we have material enough to last a while longer too."

"How delightful! But I know some of the others would like the ear of the host for a time," she bossed, prettily. "You go and talk to them, and I will stay with Miss Morgenthal," giving him a familiar little shove.

"I am so glad you are here, my dear," she continued to Edith as he went unwillingly away. "I am enjoying the quaintness of it all immensely."

"You think it is quaint?"

"O, I could hardly say that. But there are some very amusing things. You have been in the village since I last saw you?"

"I live there."

"How interesting! I hope you got home safely that day. You had such a dreadful walk before you."

"But I am used to walking."

"I suppose one might get accustomed to it. We really get used to anything if it is necessary."

"There is no doubt of it," Edith agreed, pointedly, with an unfathomable smile that Miss Matthews found disconcerting.

"Yes, I am glad you are here," she continued, not understanding the smile. And as Edith made no attempt to answer she continued: "Knowles, the dear boy, is disappointed." She spoke as if overlooking the faults of one fondly loved. "He did so want us to have this one evening here alone. We have been

going about so much we have not had much time for real visiting." There was a suggestive emphasis on the last words.

"You mean he didn't want to have the party at all?" questioned Edith, with disconcerting literalness.

"O, my dear," she parried, laughing prettily. "How like Knowles you are at times, so literal and outspoken!"

"Some people don't quite dare be that way, do they?"

"There you are again. That is one reason I admire you so much: you remind me so of Knowles."

"I have been watching you from afar," John Dexter declared, approaching here and saving Edith from necessity of reply.

At first Miss Matthews turned toward him coquettishly, as if prepared to shake a playful finger at this other man. But noting the expression of his face, her smile became rather fixed.

"I am glad you got here," Edith returned his greeting, leaving the reason why to be inferred.

"If you will excuse me, dear," Miss Matthews smiled sweetly, "I will go over here. I see some one I want to speak to."

"If I were a poet," Dexter spoke in a low voice as Miss Matthews moved away, "I should tell you how wonderful you look."

"But you are a poet! I have read those two you gave me over and over again," referring to the two sheets the envelope had held.

"You have!" he beamed. "That is more than I had dared hope."

It was here she noted how excited he seemed under

his forced calm; how he seemed to be making an effort to control himself. And she thought she understood the cause. She had been expecting it momentarily now, for days, expecting him to speak to her. She felt it coming now and desired to put it off.

"I hope you do some for me," she told him.

"I shall. But the next time they will be better, for they will be all about you."

Here Carleton came up to them, unconsciously ignoring Dexter in his complete appropriation of Edith to himself. "We are going to have a funny game," he said, "and Margaret has given me the cards to pass around."

He gave her one, and forthwith requested her to give it back to him. "I will just put my name down on it so there will be no misunderstanding," he told her.

"But what kind of a game is it?" she questioned.

"I don't know what they call it. It's Margaret's work. But the card has a list of subjects on it, and you accept a partner for each subject, who writes his name opposite. When the thing starts you talk to the man whose name comes first, for four minutes, then go to the second, and so on."

As he finished he handed back her card. She glanced at it curiously. His name was written opposite each subject but one. She gasped, but inwardly she smiled.

"But you have taken them all!" she protested.

"I left one," he returned, grudgingly. "That gives you considerable leeway."

"But it will never do. I must not."

"You think it over while I go on with the cards."

When it was time to begin, he sought her out. The

first subject on the card was nonsensical, and he promptly declared as much.

"What we want to talk about," he informed her, "is something interesting. And just now the most interesting subject I can think of is you!"

"But we must go by the card."

"Let me see the card."

He took it, drew a line through the nonsensical subject, and deftly inserted her name above it. "As you say," he then declared. "We will go by the card."

"But——"

"Don't force me to take stern measures," he laughed, happily. "I might just pick you up and carry you through the door into the dining room where we could talk in peace."

"I suppose you have just got into the habit of talking like that to every girl you meet," she bantered, lightly. But in reality she was stung by the note of banter in his tone, and of a sudden was half inclined to believe he had always spoken to her more in jest than earnestness.

"Don't you think it!" He was all seriousness now. "Edith, I love you enough to do anything to get you. Put me off if you will; make me wait. But don't ever get the idea I don't mean what I say."

It was just like him, she thought, distractedly, to speak like that there in the crowded room where he might be overheard by anyone.

"I don't care who knows it," he continued, as though reading her thoughts. "I don't see how any man could help falling in love with you."

There was sudden confusion about them, for the call

had been given to change to the next subject and there was hurried movement to seek out partners.

"Four minutes gone already?" he asked in amazement. "I must speak to Margaret about that. Those periods ought to be lengthened."

He arose forthwith to go and find Margaret, but Edith called him back. She laughed in spite of herself.

"You mustn't do that," she said.

"Anyway," as he sat down again, "I was forehanded enough to get you for nearly all of them."

Then a little later, "I know I have hurried things," he was saying. "And I have always prided myself on being so cleverly deliberate. But I can't help it. From the moment I saw you I have wanted you. I feel like a man at an auction sale who is afraid somebody else will bid in the very thing he has come to get for himself. I am afraid if I don't get you right away somebody else will."

"There is the call to change," Edith reminded him.

"That's all right," he assured her. "The next one is mine too."

"But it isn't! It is the one you refused."

"Refused! Hand me the card. I can erase——"

"No, you won't!"

"Here I am," Dexter announced his presence, hesitating beside her chair. "This is mine, isn't it?"

Carleton arose reluctantly and went away, leaving her with Dexter. He took the seat Carleton had vacated, and sat silent for a moment, as if deciding just how he should begin.

As the evening wore on, Edith had found herself

increasingly dreading this period with Dexter. She had sensed his excitement early in the evening; had felt him flare up when, ignoring him completely, Carleton had taken all her periods but one.

He had said nothing, but she intuitively understood him. And she had felt, further, that when his turn came he would want to speak to her more definitely than he had yet spoken.

But she could not decide what she should say to him when he did speak. She wanted to decide; to get the whole thing over with. The uncertainty was wearing upon her. With a wan smile she thought of Molly D.

Dexter now sat beside her, a strained eagerness in his manner that was not lost upon her. It presaged, she knew, an effort on his part to shape matters a little more definitely.

"This is mine, isn't it?" he repeated.

"I believe it is," she faltered. "What is our subject?"

"If you would as soon," he said, quietly, "I would rather talk about something else."

"Certainly," she agreed with sudden asperity, determined to make up her mind one way or the other and end this very awkward situation.

"It—it is something I don't want the others to know," he continued. "Something for you alone."

"Yes?" she breathed.

He drew a sheet of paper from his pocket and handed it to her without a word. Feeling rather dazed, she took it and read it through. It was another of his poems.

"I think it is beautiful!" she managed at last.

"But that is not all," he assured her, triumphantly. "Read this."

He passed an envelope to her, from which she drew a letter. It was from a publishing house, containing a word of acceptance of some verse and ending with a rather restrained request that he contribute further.

"What do you think of that?" he triumphed.

"I think it is wonderful!" she cried, feeling she knew not what, whether relief or irritation. So this was what he had been wanting to talk to her about!

"And the credit of it is all yours," he said in a changed voice. "I never could have done it but for you."

"O, but poets are born, not made," she parried.

"But some one must stir up what is there. You did that."

She thought quickly of the John Dexter she had once known, and of this man who sat before her now with evidence in his hand that he might in time catch the ear of the world, and again she felt a glow of pride. Perhaps she had been the cause.

"I will do anything I can," she declared, impulsively.

"Anything?" he questioned, strangely, his eyes on her face.

She nodded, meeting his glance.

"What a way you have of these delightful little tête-à-têtes!" the voice of Miss Matthews interrupted playfully. "How you must enjoy them!" as she regarded Edith from under lowered lids.

"Edith and I are visiting through this one."

"Edith! What a pretty name," she continued, now

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regarding Dexter narrowly. "Think of being Della or Biddy!"

"Some could live even under that handicap," Dexter laughed, with a glance at Edith.

"Do you think so?" Miss Matthews asked, languidly. Then as there seemed nothing further to say, "I suppose Knowles will be looking for me. Sorry to have interrupted you," she said as she went airily away.

She met Carleton, who was making for the corner with ill concealed impatience. "They haven't got through yet," Miss Matthews told him, referring to Edith and Dexter. "Some dispute. I just left them. You will have to talk to me," she finished, coyly.

"Sorry," he answered, heartily. "But this is the last one and I am signed up for it."

"I hardly think you will be missed," she insisted, with a meaning glance toward the corner.

"But——"

"Come, now," she teased, playfully. "Have you forgotten how to talk since you have been on the farm? They say farm work makes boors of the best of men."

"That's because they don't know how to farm," he answered, instantly. "Come on and I will show you. What is the subject?"

"Let's walk around while we talk. I am tired of sitting," she smiled up at him.

Edith glanced up expectantly when the period was finished, but failing to see Carleton near her, looked out over the room. She saw him just as Miss Matthews was smiling up at him.

Dexter followed her glance. "The host and the guest of honor look splendid together," he commented,

with no hint of guile. But catching sight of Margaret just then, he arose hastily. "Pardon me. I see Margaret. This is my time with her."

And did she imagine it, or was there a hint of elation in his words? Did he not approach Margaret with the look a man reserves for one woman alone?

Edith was thus left by herself. She glanced at the card Carleton had so boldly filled, and bit her lip as she did so. She felt she must be terribly conspicuous, sitting there alone. It was a new experience.

"Hello," Miss Matthews called, brightly, as she and Knowles passed the corner.

Edith was more than vexed. She wished she had not promised Margaret to stay all night with her. She wanted to get up and leave. No, she was not angry, she told herself. She merely wanted to show everybody that she did not care a snap of her finger!

It was after the party was over and each guest had departed, that she found herself with Margaret up in the latter's beautiful room. In a way the situation had not cleared for Edith. Carleton had had no further chance to speak with her. Perhaps he was looking forward to a better opportunity when he should take her home the next day. Dexter had not spoken as she thought he would, while Miss Matthews had continued her thrusts under cover of her sweet smile.

"Did you like it?" Margaret now asked in the confidential voice which says that at last all evasions may be dispensed with and absolute frankness prevail.

"I thought it was a beautiful party," Edith assured her.

"It was," Margaret affirmed, delightedly. "Everything went off so nicely. You looked adorable."

"And I never saw you look so pretty."

"Did I?" She fairly caught at the words. "Did I?"

"You looked too sweet for anything."

"O, I am so glad."

After a silence given over to recollections of what had been said and done, of how this had not been exactly as planned and that had been perfect, she spoke again—almost as if to herself, her eyes glowing with happiness.

"Did you notice how Mr.—Mr. Dexter looked?" she asked, softly. "How fine he stood up, and how his eyes looked?"

"Did he?" Edith forced herself to speak calmly, hiding her amazement.

"O, I think he is the most splendid man. He doesn't seem like anybody else I ever knew," she continued, her eyes now soft.

"I like him very much," Edith agreed, formally.

"You won't say anything, Edith, dear?" she appealed in her rushing little manner, a bright spot appearing on each cheek. "But I—I believe I love him."

"You dear!" For Edith again felt the appeal of Margaret to that protective tendency within her. "Has he ever said anything?"

"O, no, no!" she gasped. "But I just thought—hope—you know such things have happened," she ended, wistfully.

Edith could find no answer to this. It was so unexpected that she was caught utterly unprepared; it

ran so counter to some of her own thoughts that she had barely admitted to herself; and yet she realized how Margaret, dear, sensitive, retiring, and withal adorable thing that she was, must be stirred to speak as she had spoken.

A gladsome little voice within her told her that she had nothing to fear; that she was first, ahead of all others. But she silenced it almost with shame that she should assert herself against Margaret, Margaret, who believed in everybody and who had already bared her own heart.

"I know," she answered, uncertainly. "And we will hope that this comes out all right too," she faltered, herself hardly knowing what she meant.

"But ought—O, I am so ashamed!—ought I do anything?"

"I don't think so," Edith hastened to advise. "Just let things take their own course." But she was troubled to know whether this advice had been given in her own or in Margaret's behalf.

The next morning at breakfast Carleton announced that he would be ready to start for town in an hour, and it was clear from his manner that he faced the trip without appreciable dread.

"You can be ready by that time?" he asked Edith.

"I am ready now."

"So am I," Miss Matthews spoke up also. "I am so glad you are going this morning. I had to go in, and it saves a special trip."

Carleton's jaw dropped. "You going? I had only thought to take the buggy."

"Don't bother to take more on my account. You

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and Margaret and I have ridden in it. I don't mind."

Carleton went gloomily out to the barn, and in less than an hour drove up to the house. Edith came out, bag in hand, wearing a simple serge of navy blue. Miss Matthews followed her, walking with languid grace, somewhat triumphant of manner.

Little was said on the way to town, Carleton keeping a rather glum silence, Edith looking ahead almost too fixedly, and Miss Matthews busied with her own thoughts.

When they reached the parsonage Carleton helped Edith out, while Miss Matthews fluffed her skirt in the now roomier seat.

"I'll be up again as soon as I can," Carleton spoke almost in a whisper. "I'll call up."

"The drive back will be so much fun," Miss Matthews cut in, sweetly. "It is getting so warm and springy!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE emergence of the real John Dexter, once the original impulse was given, was accomplished in a way entirely commonplace. There was nothing of the dramatic, nothing of the spectacular to mark either the death of the old self or the awakening of the new.

The call simply came to him, perhaps partly through his regard for Edith, doubtless also because of his own triumphant manhood, to subjugate the social self which got its coloring from without, to the individual self which was simply the expression of his own latent personality.

His problem was not peculiar. Every individual that for whatever cause differs from other people has the same situation to face. The child too large for its age is forced to suffer vast humiliation; the timid are goaded by the pugnacious into a sort of fantastic belligerency wholly foreign to their nature; the bashful are stirred to a loathsome boldness to avoid being the butt of ridicule.

As for John Dexter, he had been one of the many born in this world with a strong desire for the approbation of others. To complicate this in his particular case was a nature extremely sensitive, a nature alive to the æsthetic values of life—a nature, that is, that differed markedly from the average type of his community.

His conflict, then, had been the struggle between

the natural tendency to be himself and the desire to win the approval of others: two impulses the realization of one of which would conflict with the expression of the other.

Initially he had been himself, only to encounter the hostility, none the less actual because expressed through jest or ridicule, of his social group. And so deep did the acid of this ridicule bite into his nature that for a time, even at the expense of the negation of self, he struggled for social approbation.

It was this condition that prevailed when he first knew Edith Morgenthal. It was her dislike of his assumed self that first led to his revolt against it; and once the impulse of rebellion was felt, his own selfhood doubtless asserted itself to demand its realization.

The process was gradual, with an occasional relapse back to the old braggadocio; with an occasional swing back to the other extreme when lifelong associates were shunned as being insensible to a finer interpretation of life. But it was none the less real from being somewhat gradual and erratic. Once the struggle had become articulate, the transformation was half accomplished.

Be the analysis one way or another, the fact was that John Dexter soon expressed in himself the qualities of the man he was—not dominating, not particularly positive, but none the less firmly sure of himself, asserting his own fine idealism in an unobtrusive, inoffensive but peculiarly permeating manner.

Edith Morgenthal watched this metamorphosis with all the personal pride of the gardener who finds his

favorite specimen responding to his culture. She did not know how fundamental to him this new self was; indeed, she inclined to the belief that it was an outward accretion of uncertain permanency, requiring constant encouragement for its further expression.

She encouraged him, however, not so much from a sense of duty to him as one who might fail without her as through a feeling of eager triumph that she was able to exert such an influence over him.

The other matter, that old tangle which occasionally arose to trouble her, she put resolutely from her, determined not to allow it to harass her when there was no immediate need of final decisions.

Perhaps of all his acquaintances the one who observed the emergence of his own individuality with the least surprise was Margaret Carleton herself. She observed it in a way to lead one to suspect that all along her own idealism had enabled her to detect the excellence of his nature, so that she now saw its real expression not so much with surprise as with gratification.

Seemingly, Margaret had not "done anything," but Edith knowing her secret, could not mistake her attitude. She was always at Sunday school; was ever attentive to Dexter's words. And on the one occasion when he had asked her to serve as substitute teacher she had smiled so joyously at him, and consented with such ready desire, as to leave no doubt in Edith's mind.

And Dexter himself—was he not changing?

On an occasion a few days before the Harper Jubilee Singers were to appear as a number on the lecture

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course Dexter came to Edith and in the new quietness asked her to go with him to the entertainment.

"I am sorry," she declined. "But it is impossible, this time."

"You are going?" he asked, quickly.

"O, yes," she answered, coloring.

But had she understood everything, she would not have felt for him the pity that she actually did feel—because he had come and asked her on the instance of no less a person than Margaret herself!

Margaret and Knowles were expecting to be away the week of the entertainment, so the former had explained to Dexter. And she had told him to look after Edith.

But Carleton himself had, early in the fall, secured Edith's promise to go with him to every number on the lecture course. But he had forgotten about the Harper Jubilee Singers and had consequently not told her that he should be unable to attend. She had declined to go with Dexter on the strength of this all-inclusive invitation from Knowles.

But as it turned out, both Margaret and Knowles returned sooner than they had expected, and both couples paired off for the entertainment in the usual manner.

Edith and Carleton occupied seats well in the rear. They were not seated long before Margaret and Dexter entered, to be ushered considerably nearer the front.

Margaret floated airily down the aisle, looking very appealing in a gown of soft blue, entered the seat indicated by the usher, and looked up at Dexter with a happy questioning smile before seating herself.

He answered her smile eagerly and they both sat down, she folding her hands in her lap and looking seriously toward the stage, while he studied the program which the usher had thrust into his hand.

From her seat in the rear Edith noted all—saw the mass of dull yellow hair crowning Margaret's head; saw the little tendrils that curled delicately about her white neck. She saw Dexter speak to her and indicate the program in his hand, at which she leaned ever so slightly toward him, laughing softly as she made some reply.

Nor was this all that caught Edith's eye. Dexter sat in the seat with a certain restrained grace, his shoulders clad smoothly in blue serge, the back of his head making her feel—feel—she hardly knew what, the unobtrusive gentlemanliness of him perhaps.

At the close of the entertainment when the two came up the aisle toward Edith and Carleton, Margaret was radiant. Her eyes were aglow with a soft light, while in her step there seemed a buoyancy light as summer clouds.

And Edith was jealous! Not very, but just a little. She loathed herself for it. Did she not have Knowles? But she wanted Dexter; she wanted them both!

But, after all, she reflected with a little glow, he had asked her first. That was some consolation: She might have had him. But at sight of Margaret's face her shame deepened. She put the thought resolutely from her.

"Wasn't it a beautiful entertainment?" Margaret enthused, throwing a strangely happy glance at Edith.

"Hello! You back here?" Dexter greeted, himself looking at Edith with relief.

"No, I am not going home with you, Smarty," Margaret bubbled in response to a mischievous aside from Carleton. "And I bet I'll beat you home too," she laughed in incontrollable happiness.

"I hope so," he answered, promptly. "You will if I have my way."

Then they went on, Margaret chattering gayly to Dexter as they made their way out, he responding with quick animation, his manner again expressive of high exultation. Again there was that look about him——

"Fine chap!" Knowles said as Dexter went through the doorway.

But Edith made no reply. She was mad at Dexter!

The next day Dexter met Dr. Morgenthal at the Office. "I hear little Phillips is getting worse," he said. "Have you been down to see him lately?"

"Not for two days. I will go right down now."

"I will go too. He was in the Infants' Class."

Together they went down the street and turned east, going down a few houses to where Bonar Erksen lived. His wife, known to all as Mrs. Rose to distinguish her from Mrs. Hope Erksen, met them at the door.

"O, it is you, Doctor!" she greeted, nervously, her eyes wider than was their wont, perhaps because she stood in fear of some terrible thing which she could not understand, a spiritual thing with which she could not cope. "Come in. He doesn't seem quite so well to-day. Maybe you can do something."

They went into the dining room, where Phillips was lying on a couch that had been arranged for him there so Mrs. Rose might always be near him.

The first thing that struck Dr. Morgenthal was that the little fellow had lost so much flesh during the last few days. He was very poor. One arm was out on the cover, and the Doctor's thought was that it looked like a pencil, so slim and frail it was.

The tiny nightshirt was open at the throat and revealed a part of a small pinched chest which looked very tender.

"Hello, Phillips!" he greeted. "How is my boy to-day. Better?"

Without movement of the body, the big eyes turned to search his mother's face. Dr. Morgenthal turned also.

"We were going to have a little party for him, a few days after he got sick. We had planned a big cake and a lot of block houses for him to build. But when he got sick, we had to put it off."

He turned back to the couch at this, hoping he had aroused interest, only to see the big eyes cloud as the import of the words was understood. They became misty with a great disappointment.

"Yes, honey," Mrs. Rose assured him, going to the couch, "he will plan to have it all for you when you get well."

"That we will, and more, too." But even this assurance did not banish the disappointment. "And I may have something else when I come in to see you again," he hinted, alluringly.

The cloud left the eyes at this, and in its stead came

a bright anticipatory glow. His breath came quickly, with difficulty.

"The little fellow sort of breaks you up," Dexter commented when they were again on the street.

"The little chicken-bone of a breast?"

The next day Dr. Morgenthal had a funeral that necessitated a twelve-mile drive. It was not particularly cold, for it was running close on March, but there was a raw dampness that would tell on such a trip as his.

"You must wear your heavy muffler," Mrs. Morgenthal adjured him as he was getting ready to go. "You must dress up as warmly as you can."

"Shawkins," he deprecated, "I won't need it. That air has a touch of spring in it."

He was almost ready when Mrs. Erksen came in, entering with a firm step. "I see you goin' out the other day without anything over your throat," she stated, reprovingly, "and I said you had ought to know better. I brought you this to wear to-day," as she displayed a thick heavy muffler.

Dr. Morgenthal looked quickly at his wife, a quizzical glance combining both amusement and acknowledgment of defeat. He put out a hand for the muffler.

"Now, that is kind of you, sister," he assured her. "On a drive like the one I am going to take this will be thrice welcome."

"I allus said ministers needed a little lookin' after," she averred, emphatically. "They wouldn't have the troubles they do if they got it, either."

She remained, at Mrs. Morgenthal's insistence, for a little visit after he had gone. She chose the straight

rocker and sat in it somewhat stiffly, looking at the stove.

"The stove heating well?" she asked, abruptly.

"Yes, it is. But I am ashamed of it, it looks so tacky. I have polished it too, but it seems to burn right off."

"That be unusual. I don't know as I ever see one that way before." Then after a period of silence, "Edith's been to college, she was sayin'," she said with a slight lift of the voice.

"Yes, she went through Wesleyan."

"Wesleyan. M-m. It must a took money to put her through."

"O, it did. But we managed it. The Doctor saw to that! He wanted the children to have the best education they could get."

"He couldn't a managed it on a salary like he gets here."

"O, mercy, no!" Mrs. Morgenthal agreed instantly. "He could not have begun to."

"He must a had a drop."

"A drop?" Then as she understood, "He doesn't get nearly as much here as he used to," she said.

Mrs. Erksen received this information in silence, a silence all the more disconcerting because it left in Mrs. Morgenthal's mind the haunting fear that perhaps complaints had been started, complaints that would have their consequences at Conference time in the fall.

"You just had the two children?" Mrs. Erksen changed the subject.

"We had three. We lost a daughter."

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"Just three in all."

"I don't see how I ever got that many raised," she laughed.

"I raised seven."

"Seven! I don't see how you did it."

"It did take work."

"Don't I know it! They seemed to demand the most of my time right when I was so busy."

"You had a lot of work?"

"I guess I did! I was president of about everything in the church, and had a meeting about every day."

"I worked too, when I had the seven. We lived out on the place. I helped milk eleven cows. I kept over a hundred chickens. I helped at sugarin' time, helped with the tappin' and pailin' and boilin' off, and then I sifted a hundred pounds of sugar for our own use. Besides, I cooked for four or five men and did all my housework."

"You did! I don't see how you did it."

"That be what I call work."

"It certainly was," she answered, conciliatorily, sensing this woman's hostility but not knowing the cause for it—not exactly surprised by it, however, for she had often encountered the same inexplicable attitude before.

Mrs. Erksen had not exaggerated. She had done all she said she had, and more. Her recital did not include the years of pinching, the work in the fields, the sending of the children to school at untold sacrifice.

And yet she now sat there composedly, as strong as this much younger woman with whom she was talking, a little hardened by experience, doubtless, but express-

ing in her whole personality the unyielding strength of the old pioneer stock—an aristocrat through and through.

"Sally Bay told me Edith was to stay in the library this afternoon," she commented at length.

"Yes, Hallie Bay had to go to the city to-day and asked Edith to be librarian for her while she was gone."

"Edith would make a good librarian," with conviction.

"And so does Hallie Bay," returned Mrs. Morgenthal, guardedly.

It was true that Edith was acting as librarian in the little village library that afternoon. Business, never very brisk, was now exceedingly dull.

She sat behind her desk, a not too heavy volume open before her, reading the interesting thing, but ready to slip it out of sight at the approach of custom.

Through a side window she could see the street east of the library for a full block; and when not reading, she looked down it at anyone who chanced to be out.

Looking out on one such occasion, she saw John Dexter turn the corner and come up the street, walking hurriedly, his head bowed as if in deep thought.

At sight of him she involuntarily flared up. A picture of a smooth back clothed in blue serge and topped by a head that made her feel—feel she knew not just what, flashed through her mind.

Without reason she decided that the next time she should meet him she would not speak. She might nod her head, so! or if in company, say a word or two.

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But she most certainly would treat him with a reserve that he should be unable to ignore.

She planned not to look up as he passed directly by the front window, lest he should see her and think she had been looking out at him. Reckoning he was about there, she dropped her eyes to the book. She jumped as the door was suddenly thrown open.

"Hello, Hallie," he cried, entering hurriedly. "I wanted that new book on poetics, and came up——" he broke off awkwardly on seeing her. "Where is Miss Bay?" he asked, annoyed.

"I am librarian to-day," she informed him, briefly.

"Is that so?" he returned, as if it were purely her affair and not his that it was so. "You could let me have a book?"

"I think I can find what you want."

"Get me Walter's Poetics, then, please."

His tone was elaborately polite. Some way he gave the impression of speaking to an utter stranger, but making it clear that even though one were a stranger and in an inferior position, he would not treat that one discourteously.

She didn't like this. It was all right that she should decide to treat him coldly, but it was quite a different matter for him to treat her that way. Subconsciously she had ever thought herself the stronger of the two, and now to have the attitude reversed! Very well, if he wanted to be as a stranger, she would make it easy for him.

"I know where the book is," she said with a stiff little bow.

"I had thought to take it out," he said with an inflec-

tion that informed her he had not come to talk the matter over with the librarian.

"I will get it for you." But she rebelled at seeming to do his bidding.

She came back with the book, and handed it to him without a word. He glanced at the card in the back, and lifted his brows.

"Have they quit marking the dates on the cards?" he asked.

"I had forgotten," she said, coldly, taking the book from him, terribly mortified at the oversight. If he dared ever to hint that he thought she was scared!

She was elaborately careful as she made the entries, for she wanted him to see that she absolutely did not care a snap of her finger what he thought or how he acted.

"All right now?" he inquired in businesslike voice as he took it from her again.

"It is."

"Thank you," and he turned on his heel and went out.

CHAPTER XX

I ASK ze pardon! But if we are to take ze sacrament of baptism literally, we should take everything else literally too." It was old Guiraud speaking, goaded by what he considered Mrs. Westlake's stubbornness.

"And why should we not take baptism literally?" that good lady snapped. "In these days we take this figuratively and that figuratively till there ain't nothin' left but imagination."

"But don't you see? Do you believe in ze foot-washings?"

"Foot-washings! Who said anything about washin' feet?"

"Ze Bible. It say, for us to wash each other's feet. But we take that in ze figuratif way. We don't wash ze feet! We interpret ze passage as meaning we should be humble, not actually wash ze feet. So with baptism, it is ze same. For why should we be put in ze water all over when to have it sprinkled or poured on us will serve ze same symbol?"

The subject of the lesson was Baptism, and the Old People's Class was by now thoroughly aroused over the matter. Edith had learned in large measure to take her ease while these discussions raged, understanding at last that these old people were far more ready to air their own opinions than to receive instruction from her or anybody else.

Consequently, she now sat before them in the attitude of a respectful but impartial listener, the while they thrashed the question threadbare in their own peculiar manner.

It developed with all the suddenness of an explosion that Mrs. Westlake was a firm believer in immersion. But after listening to her arguments for a moment old Guiraud had taken the opposite position, holding that the whole sacrament was meant as a symbol and that consequently one form would do as well as another.

"For my part," Mrs. Westlake asserted with elaborate calm, "I believe as long as we are Christians we ought to follow the Bible. It says we ought to be baptized; it shows 'em actually bein' baptized—bein' led down into and up out of the water. Of course for them as are not really Christians, it don't matter one way or another."

"But then should we not wash ze feet?" old Guiraud exploded, holding to his analogy. "Ze Bible, it say so; and it show them doing it."

"You can wash your feet any time you are a mind to," she shot at him, contemptuously.

"But ze Bible! It say we should wash ze feet, just as it says we should baptize. Read it! Then why should we do ze one and not ze other?"

"What do you think about it, Mr. Ackers?" Edith asked, easily.

"Me? O, it is all too deep for me," he replied, hastily, waving his hands helplessly. "I like to hear the discussions, but please don't call on me to help out."

At this Mrs. Sigfried nodded her head and smiled encouragingly, just as she nodded her head and smiled no matter what was said or done, one way or another.

"Mr. Westlake, what do you think?"

"I guess me and the woman see about alike on that point," he mumbled, his eyes on his Quarterly.

"There's only the one way to see it!" She frowned.

"Only the one," he assented.

"Poof!" old Guiraud snarled, his brooding eyes glaring balefully about. "Poof! Figuratif."

After Sunday school was over, Edith faced a situation she did not relish. She knew she could not be present the following Sunday, and it was a rule of the school that a teacher should inform the superintendent beforehand of any intention of being absent.

She felt that this rule was now binding upon her, but she shrank from the task because to go to him might seem like an advance on her part. It might seem as if she were trying to make up.

She had already resolved she would not give in to him. Of course she should have to be civil in her treatment of him, but she would never—never!—re-instate him in her friendship!

But duty triumphed and she went to him. He heard her explanation without any effort to make the task easier for her. Even when she had finished, he took it all very perfunctorily.

"Certainly! I will have no difficulty finding a substitute for that class. If it were one of the others, I might. But those old people!" He laughed, as if a child ought to handle them.

"I knew it would be easy," she said, managing to

smile, but inwardly resolving never to take the class again.

"Yes. Any time you want off, just let me know."

She went home in a fine fury, almost choking at times, so great was her indignation at him. His impudent assumption that she would even notice at all that he was acting coldly!

When she reached the parsonage it was with full intent of taking her mother into her confidence in order to have some one with whom to talk over the affair. But she found a rather sober pair in the living room when she entered.

"I am sure I do not know." Dr. Morgenthal sighed heavily. "I don't believe I can ever be certain again."

"But you have not heard anything?"

"It is what I have not heard more than what I have. People usually say something if they are pleased. Have you heard anything?" he asked, facing her squarely.

"N-no, I suppose not."

"What have you heard?" he demanded, noting her hesitation.

"Mrs. Erksen was saying you had had quite a drop in salary."

"I was afraid of it," he sighed again, his head falling forward on his breast. "We may have to go again, mother."

"I won't have it!" she flared, all the old bitterness asserting itself anew. "You are too big for this little church as it is. If they dare say anything!"

He did not reprove her as she had half expected he would. He merely rose to his feet and avoiding

her eyes, went up to his study. She listened until she heard him place a chair near the bed.

"What is it, muddy?" Edith asked, anxiously.

"It is nothing, Pattie."

"But it is! You must tell me."

"We are afraid the people will get to thinking your father is too old for this work."

"Have they said so?"

"I don't know what he has heard. He wouldn't tell me."

"But, muddy, if they should, what—what——"

"I don't know, Pattie."

"When will we know?"

"When the last Quarterly Conference is held. If they want him, they will ask him back then. If they do not——"

"They will ask him back then, I am sure."

Edith did not take the matter with great seriousness. She was too young to feel anxiety for the future. She went upstairs to change into another dress and came down shortly humming a little tune and hiding in the brown depths of her eyes a look that was too near akin to high glee to be mistaken for anxiety.

Nor did any misgivings affect her appetite. She ate with a healthy relish that spoke as truly as anything else of the innocent wholesomeness of her nature.

After the dishes were put away she yawned lazily behind her hand, glancing at the clock. Then she went upstairs to take a little nap. She often napped Sunday afternoons, or read a story.

She did not know how long she had been asleep, when she was awakened by Mrs. Morgenthal's coming into

the room. "What is it?" she asked, sleepily, rubbing her eyes.

"Knowles is downstairs."

"K-Knowles? Goodness fiddlesticks! I will have to go down, I suppose."

"Edith Morgenthal, don't you want to go?" Mrs. Morgenthal demanded with the aggravation of one who has just felt the weight of the last straw.

"I guess so," she answered. But it was no answer at all.

"I thought you would want to get out an afternoon like this," Carleton greeted her, advancing to meet her and taking her hand in both of his, as she came down dressed in white and rosily sleepy from her nap.

He glanced quickly about to see whether any chance observer might be lurking near. But she divined his intention, and withdrawing her hand walked to the window.

"It is rather nice," she said, looking out at the March afternoon that hung uncertainly between a storm and an open attempt at spring.

"I say it is. There is spring out there. A little muddy in spots, but you can put on your overs," he hinted, thinking of a long walk in the fields.

"Where shall we go?"

"Anywhere you say."

She brightened up, evidently as the result of an idea that pleased her. "We will go up this street to the end, first," she decided, getting ready.

They went up the street, and she manifested an exaggerated gayety that greatly delighted him. As

they approached the yellow house where Dexter lived this gayety increased.

She glanced covertly at the house; was attracted by movement in the back yard. John Dexter was out there looking for bulbs. She saw him, but she gave no sign in the way of recognition.

Instead, she turned an animated face to Carleton, talking to him in bubbling and innocent chatter. But Carleton saw Dexter, and called out a greeting.

"They ought to grow this kind of a day," he called.

"Who is it?" Edith asked, surprised. Then following Carleton's glance, "O, Mr. Dexter," she said, inconsequentially. "How-do-you-do, Mr. Dexter?"

Her gayety subsided somewhat after they had turned the corner. She became rather pensive, her brown eyes smoldering with a meditative glow.

They reached the end of Park Street and saw below them the great hollow cut out by ages of erosion, with little Carle creek winding like a ribbon down in the bottom and the great sugar bush over beyond.

"Let's go down there," Edith cried, pointing to the little creek.

They went through the bars into the pasture and started down the hill. March was thawing out the ground, but the sod offered a tolerably firm footing. The sun by this time had considerable power, and warmed them pleasantly as they walked along.

Carleton picked up a heavy cudgel that he found lying near the bars, and balancing a round pebble on a tuft of sod, hit it as a golf ball, sending it whizzing down the field.

"I never played golf," he regretted. "But I have

always wanted to get the heaviest club I could find and see how far I could send one of those little balls."

Indeed, he looked as if he could send one. Everything about him bespoke prodigious muscularity. In his movements one sensed the bulge of compact muscle, thinking the while of the old Roman gladiator or the Spartan in the proud march of his physical strength, while the suggestive bigness about his shoulders and the depth of his chest hinted of the same Herculean strength.

"Couldn't you send it?" Edith smiled, admiringly.

"I've always wanted to try it."

"The farm certainly develops strength. I believe you are the biggest man I ever saw."

"In a way, the farm does," he agreed, but continued regretfully, "But it doesn't give any systematic development. I may be able to lift a gasoline engine, but there are a lot of little fellows that can outdo me—the fellows that have been trained systematically."

"See the cows," she cried, pointing at them.

"This man keeps Jerseys," he nodded, contemptuously. "Only man in the county who does, I believe. Holsteins are the thing for milk."

The cows, having been turned out more because of the beautiful day than for grazing, were grouped down in the bottom. They had soon discovered the paucity of grass, and stood lazily warming themselves in the sun.

As the two approached there were many mild glances cast at them. It was only when they were comparatively close that the herd parted as if from signal, and a large Jersey bull took a step forward.

Edith gave a frightened little cry and looked quickly about her. But there was no asylum nearer than the bars they had passed nearly half a mile back, excepting on the other side of the creek. But their way forward was blocked.

Carleton also looked about, slowly, seriously. Then, "I guess we are in for it," he said, quietly. "He may not be dangerous, at that. I have bluffed more than one away."

"But there he comes!"

"You just stand still where you are."

"No, no. Let's run."

"Don't you dare run."

The bull was large. He took another jerky step forward and regarded them challengingly through wicked little eyes set in curly forehead. He lowered his head, opened his mouth slightly and emitted a low rumbling bellow.

Carleton stood his ground, the heavy cudgel in hand. Edith cowered behind him in wild-eyed terror. He smiled understandingly as he glanced at the heavy club. He might have known what it was for, up there at the bars! His fingers tightened about it.

The big fawn-colored bull took a step or two side-wise, revealing his long body, enormously stocky at shoulders but tapering back to the rump, the tawny flank resembling a lion.

He lowered his head still further, putting one front foot out for support and with the other pawing at the sod with a quick viciousness that sent little particles of earth hurtling behind him. His eyes showing white were rolled round regarding Carleton.

"I am going to run!" Edith cried behind him.

"You stay right where you are," he commanded, sternly, not looking around. "If you run, then there will be trouble."

He gathered himself together and shuffled forward quickly, throwing his body backward and waving his arms over his head, yelling "Get out!" in an effort to run the animal away.

But the bull was not to be scared away. He straightened up with a jerk, looking at these motions with belligerent interest. Then with a continuous low bellow that vibrated up and down with his step, he came directly forward, charging head-on.

Edith screamed.

With the heavy club held ready, Carleton also advanced a step. His eyes were fixed steadily on the little balls that bickered at him from the curly forehead. The lumpiness of his shoulders was now taut; the knuckles of the hand that gripped the club were white.

He bunched his body, straightened so quickly the movement was hardly visible; then snapped his big body erect and brought the heavy club down with all his gigantic strength, across the bull's forehead.

"Run, Edith. Run, now," he cried.

And now giving almost away, now stumbling only to get up and hurry on in new terror, breathing quickly, almost sobbing, she ran up the field, only to turn when she found he was not following her and start back down with a new and desperate quiet.

At the tremendous impact, the bull staggered, wavering for an instant. But with another low rumble he

recovered and lowered his head for another charge. But Carleton had expected this. Again he hurled forward, the heavy cudgel described an arch and shattered down with a thud that blinded.

"Do come away, Knowles," Edith pleaded, nearer now.

"You stay where you are."

And then, quite suddenly, the bull threw up his head with the movement of a cow that jerks back from a twig to keep it out of her eyes. It was a signal of defeat. He turned jerkily and walked away.

"I guess that was enough for him." Knowles laughed, albeit his lips were white.

Edith swayed perilously, but caught herself and smiled uncertainly at him. "I—I thought he would kill us both," she said.

"And he might if it hadn't been for this stick. I might have known all along he was in here."

"S-shall we go back home?"

"If you want to," reluctantly.

"I believe I do," she faltered.

There was little said on the way back. She was clearly shaken by the experience, and he, respecting her, did not force conversation upon her.

"We will try it some other time," he said when they had reached the parsonage. "And by another route."

"We will never go down that way again." She shuddered.

CHAPTER XXI

DR. MORGENTHAL closed the door behind him, went down the front walk and turned up the street. The big, friendly dog was waiting for him, glad as the old man that the winter had broken somewhat and these daily walks could be resumed.

"The old puppy! How is the old dog!" said the Doctor, patting the head that was presented, and then putting his fingers in the dog's mouth in the way the latter seemed ever to enjoy.

In dog language the answer was unmistakable. The old puppy never felt better, and was far happier just now than he had been five minutes ago—before he knew that his friend was coming.

Uncle Hi hailed him so promptly as he passed by as to arouse the suspicion that he, like the old dog, had been waiting and hoping. He came eagerly round the corner.

"Morning," he greeted, his eyes bright with welcome and glowing with suppressed excitement. "Got time to come down a minute?"

"I always have, Uncle. Your chickens laying better these fine warm days?"

"Lots. I get lots of eggs. But I want to show you something different."

"Got another specimen?"

"A new one," Uncle Hi answered, excitedly. "It

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ain't very often I get a new one, and when I do it works me up some."

"And what is it now?"

"Come here, beauties!" he called, softly. "Look at them come, parson. Ain't it a pretty sight? Come here to me," he said to one so slender and sleek it resembled a dove.

It came to him and gave only a formal little cackle as he picked it up—a cackle seemingly not so much of fright as to attract the attention of others to its own good fortune.

"Did you ever see such beautiful things?" he cooed as he stroked the back that resembled fresh enamel.

But he awakened to the Doctor's presence in a moment and looked about the yard for a particular one. To Dr. Morgenthal, they all looked alike. Like the average person, before knowing Uncle Hi he had considered chickens rather dirty, somewhat stringy fowls. But under the magic of Uncle Hi, they became beautiful pets and, what was more, invested with personality.

"There she comes," he cried, turning his head to one side and admiring the dainty grace of a newcomer crossing the run. "Just see that manner! The arch of her head as she steps along!"

"Is she the new one?"

"Yes, yes," impatiently, as if anyone ought to know that.

"And what do you call her?"

"Can you not guess?"

"Guess? N—no, I believe not," he gave up after a moment's fruitless effort.

"I call her To-morrow," he stated simply.

"To-morrow!"

"To-morrow. Can't you see—how she walks along with that eager step that looks forward to another day? She is like hope."

"I don't see," the Doctor hesitated, bewildered by this sudden turn from anything he had expected. "You mean she seems to anticipate?"

"And I got her from your own daughter?" Uncle Hi stated in mild reproof. "Do you know your own daughter?"

"Edith? But what does she have to do with it?"

"Do? I stay here day after day with my chickens, livin' with them and lookin' at the people I see and comparin' one with the other.

"I see your Edith walk by my door day after day. I see how she goes along, so easy with her eyes ahead, lookin' forward, knowin' the best of everything is goin' to meet her soon.

"I say to myself, 'What does that mean?' And I soon see it means hope. She was lookin' toward to-morrow. Then I see this beauty," with a fond reference to the "new one," "and I say, 'There she is. Goin' easy along and lookin' toward to-morrow!'"

"I see," said the Doctor, slowly. "To-morrow! You mean it is the way young people face the future."

"Then you have noticed it?" he asked, eagerly. "Ain't it the finest thing in the world? Edith floatin' by not thinkin' of anything but the good as is goin' to come, and with her eyes lit!"

"I have seen it," he said, hastily, not a little ashamed that he had failed to see that in his daughter which this other man had seen and loved; struck that his

very accustomedness to her had robbed her of personality for him.

"Watch her!" Uncle Hi commanded.

With a dainty playfulness that was as contagious as it was natural, To-morrow stepped blithesomely about, at one time hopping up like a robin, at another arching her head and looking out of mischievous eyes.

"The trouble is," Uncle Hi commented at last, "that soon the old hens like Rosetta and Emma 'll begin to peck at her. They'll begin to make her wise. Rosetta'll keep her distance from one so unsophisticated; while Emma, wantin' to be helpful and warn her of things she will hear from less friendly lips if she don't hear 'em now, will pump her full of her own bitterness."

As usual he confused his comments upon the chickens with his reflections about human nature, hopelessly mixing up the two.

"Yes, sir, she'll want to tell her the things the world'll tell her if her own friends don't. And she'll be bitter as a lemon about what she see in life. While all the time it's her own gizzard as is out of whack and not the world outside!"

"Life outside," he continued, waving his hands impatiently, "is all right if we can only see it all right. Trouble's with our own gizzards! Hwi, hwi, hwi."

As a striking coincidence, Emma was now by the side of To-morrow, and interrupted the latter's playfulness by the injection of her own severe and somber mien. To-morrow regarded her with proper modesty and with no little perplexity.

"I was tellin' you!" Uncle Hi exploded, seeing them. "Now that old hen's a sayin' as how she don't want

to mar the other's happiness, but of course she, Tomorrow, 's too young to know that the world'll consider her playfulness in a different light!

"I just wish," he burst forth with sudden rage, "the old sour gizzards of this world would keep their bitterness to theirselves, without tryin' to turn everybody else!"

A little later the old Doctor went on up the street toward the Office, musing on the quaint philosophy of Uncle Hi, struck anew by his insight into life, and not a little amused by the fantastic interpretation he put on his chickens' behavior.

He got his mail at the Office and went home, the dog keeping him company. When they reached the door the dog stood for a moment uncertain; but when the door was closed without his being asked in he stalked home in dignified manner, as much as to say there was a place where he should always be welcome.

A certain letter Dr. Morgenthal read with concentrated interest. Mrs. Morgenthal, observing him, was not a little anxious as to what it might contain. But after a time he put the sheet back in its envelope and sat for a little in a brown study.

"Winnie," he spoke at last, "this is an appeal from the Work in India."

"Again?" she asked, impatiently. "It is not long since we had the other from there."

"I know. But they say the work must be more generously supported."

"But we have nothing to give them?"

"I have that twenty-five dollars," he stated, not meeting her eyes.

"That you were going to get your watch with! I will not let you take it. You have always wanted that watch. And now when you have enough saved up, this comes!"

But even as she spoke she knew by his face that he had made up his mind. The soft glow came to his eyes on occasions of personal sacrifice.

"We will see," he answered, evasively.

"I think it is sinful!" she rebelled.

But even she did not know what the denial cost him.

She heard him later, up in his study, walking back and to, back and to, and she understood he was working on his sermons. Occasionally she could hear his voice, for it was his wont to go over his sermons aloud.

He was working now as he had worked for some time after his arrival at Paxton. But after the first few weeks, when the seeming delight of his people had given him confidence, he had settled down peacefully to his customary work. But now he was troubled again: the silence, the absence of praise, were making him nervous; again there was the old nervous effort to keep up. She heard him upstairs, going back and to, back and to.

"Poor Billy!" she said, thinking.

He came down a little later and declared his intention of visiting little Phillips. "The lad has been sick for so long now that I am getting anxious about him," he said.

The old dog forgot his dignity, to walk up town again, for the Doctor did not go directly to Mrs. Rose's, but, rather, went by way of the store. For, unknown to others, he had decided to make a purchase.

He entered the store somewhat uncertainly, because he did not know exactly what he might get. He had decided against candy, because Hope Erksen had so frequently given candy that by eating at a shameful rate little Phillips would have supply enough to last a long time.

But if not candy, then what? He had seen little boys dressed from head to foot in a kind of knit garment that made them look like little cub bears, and for one breath he decided to get Phillips one of these. But he reflected sanely that summer was coming apace, and it could not be worn then.

Also, with shrewd recollections it occurred to him that boys take greater delight in toys than in becoming clothes. A toy it should be therefore.

He examined a dog made of white felt which regarded him coldly through glass eyes. He did not like the eyes. He looked at a horn of many colors and undoubted sounding qualities, but discarded it.

The article that finally took his eye was a sort of Jack-and-the-Bean-Stalk. The thing was inclosed in a little box from the top of which a ring protruded. By holding the box down with one hand and pulling on the ring with the other, a string a foot in length unwound, up which a little tin monkey shot with a great clatter and at lightning speed.

The old Doctor chuckled as he pulled the string; chuckled more when the little red monkey shot up it. "I'll take this," he decided, still chuckling.

He went out carrying it under his arm, a broad smile on his face. He could imagine Phillips' shout of glee as he pulled the string and saw the result. He

was so tickled with the thing himself that he took the wrapping off and pulled the string again.

"Naow, what you doin'?" said a voice behind him, causing him to turn quickly.

"O, it's you, is it?" he chuckled, recognizing Hope Erksen. "You can't guess what I have!"

"Not while I'm lookin' at it?"

He demonstrated the phenomenon; but nothing would satisfy Hope Erksen save to operate it himself. When he had pulled the string and observed carefully the result, he handed the box back to its owner.

"A good idee," he declared. "I got him this!" he continued, displaying a white pup with glass eyes. "You goin' down naow?"

"Sure."

The two men put their heads together and speculated as to how Phillips would receive their gifts. They finally decided, just before they reached the house, that he would come near getting up to play with them. At any rate, they would put heart into him.

Mrs. Rose hurried to the door and fairly snatched them into the house. "Come in, quick!" she panted, her eyes wide with terror. "I am here alone and I'm sure something terrible is happening to him."

They hurried in. He was lying on the couch as usual, but now his breath came with difficulty. As if sensing their presence, he opened his eyes and looked at them. Hope Erksen went anxiously over and knelt down, placing a hand on the white forehead.

The big eyes opened wider, there was a half convulsive movement, and the little pencil arms were thrown about his neck. Forgetful of everything in his own

great joy that he had been recognized and that the boy still had strength enough for movement, Hope Erksen hugged him close and held him there, saying nothing.

Then the child's head fell back, looking very large in comparison with the thin little neck. Hope Erksen looked at the face, at the small chicken-bone breast, then started back.

"Phillips!" he cried.

But Phillips was dead.

There was a scream behind him as Mrs. Rose rushed to the couch and, shoving him aside, gathered the child in her arms. "O, my little baby! my little baby!" she sobbed.

Mechanically Hope Erksen put his hand in his coat pocket. It rested on the dog of white felt with the glass eyes. He looked over at Dr. Morgenthal.

Dr. Morgenthal had witnessed many such scenes in his long ministry, but each succeeding one stabbed him anew. Years had but deepened and mellowed his sympathy; they had not dulled it.

He now saw his friend in sorrow; he knew that the old man had loved the little child in the peculiarly devoted manner of the very old for their little grandchildren. Consequently, what Hope Erksen saw when he looked at him was a face seamed with suffering, the lean flesh of the mouth trembling and defying effort at control.

They tell me that Hope Erksen was never quite the same after little Phillips died; they tell me that he went home that afternoon and faltered up the stairs to the attic, and that it was there Mrs. Erksen found him

later, sitting before a table drawer in which was a brown bag filled with peppermint candy. But they tell me also that from that day on, never did man love man as Hope Erksen loved his old pastor.

If you should visit Paxton, you would get a word here and a sentence there that would enable you to form a mental picture of these two old men, the minister very large and inclined to be a little fleshy, the other smaller and gray and rather poor, walking about together, sitting in easy chairs and in the shade of trees, thinking, talking, remembering. . . .

And the bond that bound them together was cemented as the one looked over at the other with little Phillips between.

It was a few days after the funeral that Mrs. Erksen, visiting at the parsonage, brought up the subject of Phillips's death. Immediately the topic was broached, the severity departed from her features, leaving only the expression of a great love whose object was gone.

"I have had seven," she said, haltingly, this new emotion just a little difficult for her who for so long had been largely impersonal. "They be all alive. Little Phillips is the first to go."

Mrs. Morgenthal excused herself for a moment and went upstairs. Returning, she brought a small oval frame done in gold, and handed it to her guest.

"That is the one I lost," she said, simply.

From out the frame a pair of clear eyes looked softly forth; above, the low forehead soft as velvet, below the artist-penciled nose and the full volatile mouth. Unlike Edith and yet resembling her in some subtle man-

ner, the face was a sweet face, eager, virginal, and very lovable.

"Her name was Donna," Mrs. Morgenthal whispered.

Mrs. Erksen had known somewhat of this before. But now she not only knew: she understood. Expression of emotion with her was difficult. She simply sat for long looking at the beautiful face of the picture. Then without a word she arose and faced the other woman.

Mrs. Morgenthal, blinded partly by tears, nevertheless saw and understood. From the face of this Mrs. Erksen all the old hostility had fled, and the face was the face of a mother.

"Forgive me," she faltered.

"Of course."

CHAPTER XXII

EDITH held the card in her hand, and as she looked at it her mouth puckered in a way that with her meant the last stage of exasperation. It was from Lila Matthews; it was a snapshot of Lila and Knowles standing out somewhere in the open; and it contained the information that Lila was returning to Paxton soon for a little sugaring party. To have read the words, a stranger might have imagined that the writer and Edith had been sorority sisters, and that a separation mutually unbearable was soon to be happily terminated.

"Well, I never!" Edith exclaimed.

From which it might be inferred that the two had not been sorority sisters, but that there was an ulterior purpose behind the card.

"If she thinks I care, she is mistaken," she continued with a vehemence that made it plain she was not wholly unmoved. "And if she thinks she can do anything, let her!"

This outburst came strangely from Edith's lips, for her lips were more often parted in a smile that was happy and that revealed pearly teeth that were unlike the teeth of any other woman, pointing that way.

Her exasperation came not so much on account of Miss Matthews's possible return, although Edith did not consider her very enjoyable company. It sprang mainly from her own uncertainty.

Occasionally a girl finds herself in the position of Edith: she feels a call in one direction and another in a second, and wants to answer the call that is supreme, but cannot decide which one it is.

The tendency is often observed in literature to make all decisions of life contingent upon external forces; to consider a human being a machine, that is to say, a machine always acting in response to external circumstances.

There could not be a greater error than this. Life's greatest struggles are often inward. The fiercest conflicts are often struggles of the soul between competing influences.

It was so with Edith. She faced a situation all the more troublesome for her because it was inward; more troublesome because, being inward, the decision rested with her and not upon external events.

When she first met Knowles Carleton she had responded to his open and abrupt love-making because it thrilled her and carried her away by its very impetuosity. She liked his dominating manner; there was something so deliciously masterful about it!

On the other hand, she had known John Dexter for some little time before he had made any particular impression upon her. He was just a person, like the many others she met every day; there was nothing distinctive or particularly attractive about him.

Even when she did know him better, it was not very much in his favor. For her first consciousness of him, above his being merely a person like the many others she met, was of his bombastic boastfulness, his tendency to "blow," as Sally Bay fitly termed it.

But there was another stage, when she glimpsed a depth to his personality that aroused her curiosity. She saw more and more of this self as time went on, and it so fit in with her own secret thoughts and emotions that it drew her to him as those are drawn together who know they may speak freely between themselves and be understood.

Later still she came to realize that she herself was the cause of the emergence and dominance of this new attitude in him, and with this realization came a glow of pride in her influence over him. This also was supplemented by a sense of duty: she felt she should not allow this new John Dexter to be replaced by the old when it was within her power to prevent it.

Added to all this had been the emotional atmosphere which had come over her when in his presence ever since the day they had gone skating on Hollaton. It was an atmosphere of personality suggestion that emanated from him and enveloped her with vague hint of intimacy.

She could not escape it. It caught her and held her with the force of an actual caress, compelling her to consider him, not as a protégé, not as an escort, but as a man with thoughts toward her like the thoughts of other men. It was at such times as these that she felt him on the point of making declaration of his love, even as had Knowles Carleton.

For a long time she had considered him tolerantly. He had suffered much from the ridicule of those who did not appreciate him; and he was undoubtedly improving. But nevertheless she had usually felt her superiority to him; not a haughty feeling, but a mild

generous one—the feeling of a boy toward his younger sister.

This feeling gave her license. She might be angry with him; might even snub him on occasion. But, of course, it would never do for him to be angry with her.

But it was this condition that he had so completely disregarded after the concert. She had decided to punish him. For what? O, just to punish him! But it had ended by his coming into the library and being actually rude to her.

In reality, though Edith herself did not exactly understand this, his actions on that occasion had supplied the final stage in her understanding of the real John Dexter. He was not only one who had suffered and was improving; he was a man who could be angry with her.

Once she realized this, her feeling of superiority vanished. She did not know just why he had treated her so that day in the library. But she found herself vaguely troubled about it.

She was now the younger sister and he the boy. She got to wondering what he thought of her. She was even afraid he might be disappointed in her, thinking she did not measure up to his first high opinion.

Now, when a woman begins to wonder what a man might think of her; and not only that, but when she begins to hope that he might think very, very highly, she is in a good way to falling in love.

And she knew it!—knew it not so much because of positive affection for John Dexter as because he was making it increasingly difficult for her to make up her mind to accept Knowles Carleton.

Suppose Dexter should come—to-day. And ask her. She couldn't put him off. There could be no temporizing with this new John Dexter she had aroused. It would be yes or no, once for all.

She had no doubt about his coming. She was certain he did not love Margaret. Had he not asked her first? Besides, there were other ways of knowing.

Mrs. Morgenthal entered the room. "What is it, Pattie," she asked on seeing the card. Edith handed it to her without a word. She looked at the picture; read the brief message.

"This, and from her!" she exclaimed.

"Doesn't it beat all?"

"Why don't you quit putting things off and decide! Then there would be an end to all this."

"Mother!"

"I know, Pattie. But don't you think——"

"I don't know what I think." And with a little gesture of despair she sought her mother's arms.

The sugaring party was fortunate in the selection of a day. The sun went down the evening before and threw amethyst streamers back over the sky as a signal to the powers of the East for a perfect day on the morrow.

It was March. The night was sharp, with the stars still cold in the distant milky way. But morning dawned in a soft radiance that a month later would bring the song birds.

Edith felt the call of the morning with the exuberant life of a young and healthy gazelle. She dressed for the day in dark brown skirt and middy, reserving the big sweater for use later on.

It was about two of the clock when she heard the indistinct but unmistakable expressions of gayety from up the street. The members of the party soon came gustily down.

Margaret waved a greeting which was followed by a shout from Knowles. John Dexter, walking with others in the rear, neither waved nor shouted, while Miss Matthews hurried forward to greet Edith with an enthusiastic hug.

"It is so interesting to be back," she gushed, with a total absence of the old hauteur.

There was no pairing off on the way out. That would come later, on the way back, perhaps. Now there was no thought but for promiscuous and hilarious funniment.

The funny little sugar house, with its blackened sides and the little elevation at the top, stood out in the open cleared field adjoining the bush. There were some big maples growing near it, old gnarled trees that for more than a generation had been yielding their sap to ingenious man. It was good sap: sweeter than that of the trees growing in the thick of the bush.

When the party arrived they found things in full swing. Days before a wagon piled high with pails had been drawn through the bush. The pails were scattered by the trees according to the size of the trees: for a small tree, one pail; for a larger two; and for exceedingly large trees, three and four pails.

Then, armed with bits and spiles, a number of men spread fanlike through the bush and tapped these trees, inserting the spiles and hanging the buckets on the snouts of the same.

Finally all the pans and conductors were gone over and cleaned, cords of wood were carried into the sugar house, and all was ready for the boiling.

A cold night, a bright day, and the sap began to run. A gathering tank was fastened to a sled, and men went the round of the trees, pouring the sap from the pails into the tank. It was brought back, strained into the big storage tank in the sugar house; a roaring fire was started in the arch, connections were made, and the sugaring-off began!

A man kept the fire a roaring under the big seven-pan arch, watched the sap as it went from front to back through the pans; and stood at the last pan with the cornpopper paddle in his hand, watching and stirring.

Every half hour or so, dipping the paddle into the boiling sap of this last pan and holding it up vertically, he saw that the sap hung to it in a golden sheet instead of dripping from it like water. It was done. Deftly he tipped the pan and drained it, straining the finished product into the final tank.

Edith was vastly curious about the whole process, from the scattering of the pails to the straining into the final tank. "I want to know all about the whole thing," she cried.

"Sure you do," Carleton agreed, instantly. "I will take you over the bush and will show you everything."

This was the very thing Edith did not want. Not being able as yet to make up her mind, but knowing that Carleton would try to press decision upon her should opportunity afford, she had been grateful that

Lila Matthews had insisted on being constantly with him, and she hoped it might be so for the present.

"But, Knowles, do explain this cunning little flipper to me," Miss Matthews pouted, prettily, pointing to the regulator on the evaporator.

"Isn't it cleverly made?" Edith asked, interestedly, trying to draw his attention from her to it.

As she turned away, leaving him explaining the process to Miss Matthews, and glad to have escaped a situation with such embarrassing possibilities, she was met by the little Old Man.

"Be this your first visit to a sugarin'?" he asked, mildly.

"I never saw it before." She smiled brightly at him. "What is that?" as she pointed toward the returning sled.

"They've been getherin'. Want to see it?"

Eagerly she consented; and with a mild interest he shuffled along beside her, pointing out the big bush with buckets hanging from each tree like big saddlebags.

"It ain't like it was when we used to gether hereabouts," he reminisced after a time. "Back yonder," with a gesture that carried back three quarters of a century, "we had no buckets like these. We used troughs, cut out of cucumber or white wood trees. There was no saws then. We cut down cucumbers and white woods and split 'em and hollowed 'em out with an adz. Then we propped 'em up at the root of the trees to ketch the sap. We didn't have no spiles like these here, either," showing her one made of metal and having the little lip that holds the bucket. "We

sometimes bored into a tree with an old pod auger and used a spout made of elder. But we mostly used a gouge, goug'in' out a place about so broad," measuring the distance across his four fingers. "And next we would put in there a little pine split with a notch or two cut in it. It took a man to handle them troughs! But he come around with the sled and a barrel on it, and hauled the sugar water in. We had some times back there!" he ended with a mild wistfulness that saw what was long since gone.

On their way back Miss Matthews stepped partly from behind a brush heap made of the top of a fallen maple. She saw Edith and the Old Man coming up the path, and unperceived by either, stepped quickly back.

"Of course," Edith heard the voice of Miss Matthews, pitched slightly higher than usual, from the other side of the heap. "Of course, if you want to. Clear down there? Surely, I can stand it if you can."

There was the rumbling of a bass voice in reply, which Edith recognized as Carleton's, though she did not understand what he said.

"You—there!" Lila again spoke, now somewhat breathlessly, as if there had just been a little struggle. "Always wanting your own way and—getting it!"

Edith was seized with the fear that they might emerge quickly from behind the old tree top and, seeing her standing there, suspect that she had heard what they said—that she had contrived to hear it!

She looked wildly about in search of topic for conversation, glanced down at the little Old Man, only to find him still looking backward to sugaring parties

in the far past. She wanted to run, to disclaim any intention of listening.

At this moment, with her holding his hand behind her back in the manner of casual but intimate interest, Lila and Knowles stepped into view.

Lila took an awkward step from him, dropping his hand and looking slightly confused and embarrassed. She glanced at Knowles, then at them.

"Edith! Are you down here? We might all have gone together had we known it. Knowles has just said we are to go clear to the other side of the—the 'bush,' isn't it?"

"Sure. Come and go back," Knowles urged, stepping promptly forward. "An hour before supper time."

"We have just been down."

"But there is more to see."

"Do come, Edith."

"Did you want to see the arch?" the Old Man asked, suddenly awakening from his dream of the past. "We kin go see it now."

"I wish we might," as she smiled good-by to the others. "You seem to know all about it."

"I ought to. I've sugared here for nearly eighty years."

She was relieved as they went on. She had never analyzed her feeling for Lila Matthews. Beyond a temporary aggravation, she had not affected her. For some reason Lila failed to convince Edith: she did not disturb her. But she was relieved to leave them and go back with the Old Man.

"Now you have seen the bush, there is something I

want to show you," Dexter said, disengaging himself from Margaret as Edith approached the camp, the smile on his face showing that the hatchet was buried.

"But we are going to see the arch," she replied, hastily, indicating the Old Man. "Maybe, then."

She did not know whether she wanted to laugh or cry or be angry with herself. She ended by being furiously angry with Carleton and very conciliatory toward John Dexter. She was glad the hatchet was buried.

Time came for supper. Eggs were dropped in the sap to boil, and along with them went potatoes. Wieners were fastened to long sticks and held over the glowing coals of the arch. Savory odors soon began to fill the little house.

"Don't be afraid of dirt," Carleton said with a laugh, finding Edith trying to scalp a wiener that was partly charred. "The more you eat the better it will taste when it is down."

"All right," she rippled, and opening her mouth, she bit daintily into the thing.

"Don't you like it now?" Carleton jested, watching her moist lips closing over it.

She nodded her head, her mouth full.

"I'll peel your potato," as he got it out of the sap.

But a little after supper was over, there was that uncertainty which is always apparent when one thinks another might want to go home. This was the time Edith had dreaded. And there was that in the half challenging glances of Knowles Carleton which told her she had occasion to dread it—if she were of uncertain mind.

Margaret seemed to grow particularly nervous as this general uncertainty deepened. The color came and went in her cheeks. She was flushed and vivacious one moment, only to be slightly paler and a bit questioning the next.

When Dexter was near her she responded to his remarks with quick effort to please, which was even more marked in her manner when he went away, thereby suggesting high nervous tension.

Edith went to the door of the camp and stepped outside, only to be quickly followed by Margaret. She was breathing quickly, while her face in the gathering dusk showed flushed and excited.

"I am so ashamed!" she began, breathlessly. "But—can't you see? If only you would say something to him!"

"Say something to him?" she repeated, puzzled.

"Don't you see?" the other hurried on, going up to her. "He can't make up his mind. I really believe he half wants to go with you! If you could only make him see."

"But what could I do?"

"Just say something!" And here she buried her burning face in the other's breast. "Something that will make him see you don't care that—that way!"

"I will see," she breathed. And disengaging Margaret's arms from about her, she went out toward the bush.

She looked back quickly and made sure there was no one following. This was as she wished. She wanted to be alone, to think, to decide. She thought fleetingly

of Lila Matthews, only to dismiss her impatiently. Lila had not convinced her.

But she thought of Margaret, of the tremulous eagerness of her eyes as she had turned them to her for just one moment. And Margaret she could not dismiss. Margaret not only convinced her; she convicted her.

Margaret had asked her to make John Dexter see that she did not care for him—in that way. She had asked it because she herself did care for him in that way.

For all her old confidence, Edith now felt guilty. But when she commanded herself to settle her doubts once and for all, the old tangle again emerged: she saw a big, bright world on the one hand and a softer world on the other, and between them she could not decide.

Her position was all the more intolerable in that she had no hope the decision would be made for her by the clearing up of some external situation. No person, long thought lost, should appear suddenly to make all things clear; no misunderstanding was to be corrected by the quick appearance of a misplaced letter. There was no misunderstanding; no lost person. The difficulty lay with her, and consequently with her was the final power of decision.

She sat down on an old maple stump and impatiently commanded herself to decide the matter, as though by sheer decisiveness she might make her way clear. Then in a little panic lest her absence should occasion comment, she hurried back to the camp.

When she entered the house, now ruddy from the

glow of the arch, Margaret's eyes sought hers with a timid request for her decision. Edith averted her own, loathing herself as she did so. But it was when spurred by this loathing that she began to watch her chance.

It soon came. Dexter stood a little apart, watching the sap running into the first pan. He looked up quietly as she approached. Clearly, the old hostility had been forgotten by him, as his words before supper had indicated. She was glad, yet she now hesitated.

"Since Miss Matthews is here," she spoke hurriedly, "I think you had better take Margaret home."

"You say that?" he asked, looking at her searchingly.

"Y-yes," she faltered, looking down at the pan.

"If you say so, of course."

"I do."

A little later Margaret's eyes met hers, and they were eyes that pooled a mystic happiness that radiated and flashed with soft glory. Margaret had made arrangement with the man she loved.

Edith did not know who finally arranged matters, or why they turned out so. There had been the usual wild scuffle, there was much scrambling for place; and she found herself walking down the road with Charlie Steele, while in front were Knowles and Lila, and behind, Margaret and John Dexter.

She resented for a moment that she was walking with Charlie. He was rather clownish; his mother called him Charlie in the belief that no one could shorten that name as Jacob is shortened to Jake or Richard to Dick. But his friends called him Lizzie.

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He was now very voluble, talking loudly and gesticulating wildly. Resentment burned hot within her—until she thought. Then she was glad: It was better so until she knew.

She was in her room that night, and just ready to turn out the light, when Mrs. Morgenthal entered. "So you had a good time?" she asked, searching her daughter's face as if to get answer from it and not from words.

"We had a wonderful time. I drank so much of the good hot sirup that I nearly died."

"And did——?"

"I came home with Charlie Steele."

When Mrs. Morgenthal spoke again her tone was almost meditative.

"Did I ever tell you about Gertie Sands?" she asked.

"N-no, I believe not."

"She was a girl on our first charge. She was pretty too, with a lot of yellow hair and a beautiful skin. But she was a hollow-headed sort. But the boys all liked her! She had any number of fellows. But there were two especially. They were fine boys, and I guess Gertie wanted to dandle both of them to show off. It was wonderful how the men ran after her. But she went a little too far. Some said they got together in some way and found out a few things. But they quit her, whatever the reason. They got tired of being put off, I suppose. Men are like that sometimes."

Silence greeted this. Then changing suddenly, "How many were in the party?" she asked.

"About a dozen, I guess," Edith answered, thinking.

CHAPTER XXIII

"WE will just spend this evening quietly at home," Dr. Morgenthal said contentedly, as a long twilight of a mild day faded into darkness.

"That will be all right," his wife agreed.

They had a little fire in the stove, for the evenings were still chilly. Mrs. Morgenthal, sitting well back, was sewing on the ends of a table runner, while Dr. Morgenthal, whose face was softened by a great faith, was reading of the exceeding great and precious promises. Earl was clumsily trying to sew down the frayed cover of an old baseball. Near him Edith was reading a love story.

But the evening was not to be spent quietly at home. There was a sound as of much stamping of feet on the porch. Mrs. Morgenthal sprang up and looked quickly about her; the Doctor frowned in mild protest. The bell rang.

First to enter the room was old Thaddeus Kline, with his hard, leathery face broken up into a broad and insinuating smile. Following him closely was Lilly Barbour, her light coat falling open at the throat and revealing a dainty wealth of blue crepe de Chine. Hovering about her was the odor of a rare and seductive perfume.

Mrs. Thaddeus Kline came next, a mild little woman of washed-out complexion. And last of all came

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Victor, looking freshly brushed and barbered, the unmistakable scent of bay rum hinting of recent shampoo and thorough cleanliness.

Mrs. Morgenthal welcomed them with the aplomb that comes of a lifetime experience of strange things. As for Edith, she could only gape her astonishment as she speculated on the purpose of these four, of all others, at the home of the minister.

"Not expectin' company, eh?" the hard voice of old Thaddeus managing a kind of bold hilarity. "What's that about the onexpected always happenin'?"

"The unexpected is the welcome too," the old Doctor assured him. "Come right in."

The four seated themselves, old Thaddeus up near the stove with his hands held out to it as though he were numb with cold, taking this means to hide an embarrassment he would rather die than own. His wife sat down quietly and folded her hands, content here to leave all details in other hands.

Victor sat down and drew his left ankle up to his right knee, revealing that the shoes he wore had seen service for one day, if all of that.

Miss Barbour leaned back in her chair, slightly throwing her coat open so that the subtle and elusive perfume of her floated out over the room. Her dress was so dainty and fragile with a kind of simple yet elegant suggestiveness as to hold Edith fascinated.

The topic of the weather was soon exhausted. Even the prospect of spring crops was not sufficient to hold attention but for a brief period.

There soon fell over the room that unwieldy silence that is ever eloquent of deferred purpose. To Thad-

deus Kline, this was unbearable. He straightened up with a return of his bold hilarity.

"Have you got your marryin' togs handy, Doctor?" he asked.

"That I have," the Doctor assured him in the manner of one who knows no surprise.

"That is what these two are here for," waving his hand to include Miss Barbour and his son. "They want to get married."

"Certainly. Do you have the license?" he asked, turning to Victor.

Victor was quick to assure him. Indeed, he looked as if there was nothing he would not do to oblige. His shock of black hair stood up in hilarious abandon; his lips seemed bent on smiling perpetually.

He took from his pocket the familiar license with its pink lines and handed it over with a flourish. Dr. Morgenthal scanned it imperturbably, while Edith looked on popeyed.

They looked very handsome as they stood up to be married—Victor in his new clothes and firm with a high purpose, and Lilly Barbour standing beside him, the inevitable fright that every woman experiences in this momentous moment showing itself in a slight rigidity of her body.

Yet was her poise beautifully confident; the deep depths of her dark eyes were aglow with the radiance of happy womanhood. The delicate blue of her gown, now that her coat was thrown off altogether, made of her a picture, in Edith's fascinated eyes, of a very wonderful bride.

After the ceremony Victor was a man triumphant,

a very king in his high exultation. And his new wife responded to his mood, now with a contented little laugh, now with a softly spoken word that held him wholly enthralled.

Even as they went out through the door and old Thaddeus Kline threw back a remark intended to be slyly facetious, the new Mrs. Kline turned to her husband with a little gesture of happy abandon that appealed to Edith enormously.

But with the closing of the door the spell was broken. Edith came back to earth with a thud and turned to her mother, her face fairly working, so great was her incredulity.

"But," she gasped, "they were not going to get married. He was already married!"

"Shawkins," her father chuckled, indulgently, himself ignorant of the rumors that had been afloat. "They are just married now. Did you not see it?"

"But, I tell you, they were not going to be married," Edith declared stubbornly. "He ran off to York State and married another woman!"

Mrs. Morgenthal, having been kept fully informed of all the developments in the case from the beginning, now turned to her husband a face that confirmed Edith's wild statements, while at the same time she silently demanded of him that he disprove them if he could.

"Eh?" he said, stupidly, his jaw dropping.

"It is true," Edith held out. "He went to York State and married a Mrs. Volten."

"He did—nit?" spoke up Earl in his quavering, uncertain voice, triumphant now as having the more

accurate information, but contemptuous of the others' ignorance. "Yes he did! He went to New York to buy an apple farm."

"But Lilly resigned because he ran away."

"She quit to get ready to get married! Did you think he ran away and got married, honest?" he asked in lofty contempt.

"But everybody says so!" Edith wavered, too dumfounded to think coherently.

"Sure. And now he would come back and get married again, would he? That's the way people do, get married twice," Earl came back at her with the cynical smile of one who has facts on his side. He stopped to let his remarks sink in. Then, "You let these old women fill you full," he finished in disgust.

Have you ever lived in an old town, a small old town? Then you have often wondered about a certain thing: You have often wondered how the many rumors get started that are always afloat, and what lends them their semblance of credibility.

The story of Victor and Lilly will answer your query. The two were engaged, that was true. And Mrs. Maggie Volten, inheriting property, had moved to New York, that also was true.

But when Victor went to New York, he went to buy a fruit farm. Earl was right there. But what of Sally Bay and the many others who did not know of this? What but Maggie Volten, of course!

And since he had gone there to marry Maggie, wouldn't Lilly return the ring? What girl wouldn't? This surmise was made doubly certain when the box containing Victor's scarf pin passed through the Office.

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One event followed another inevitably, after that. The letter delivered to Lilly on the night of the linen shower contained the depressing news that the writer could not return for weeks, maybe months. But would not Lilly's depression be evidence to Sally Bay knowing what she did, of a far different occurrence?

As to the anger of Thaddeus Kline when he reached town after receiving a letter from his son, had the roads not been enough to infuriate a far milder man, and did not his visit to the notary concern the signing of a deed? But to others in the town, knowing what they did, his visit and actions concerned something altogether different.

The next afternoon Edith discovered that she would have to visit Mrs. Erksen rather early. It was almost too soon after dinner when she arrived; but Mrs. Erksen was ready to receive callers. In fact, one was already there. Sally Bay had dropped in.

Edith joined in the conversation, but waited eagerly for an opening. She was elated at having this exact information before the others; she also wanted silently to reprove Sally Bay for spreading incorrect rumors. She was glad Sally Bay was there.

"You can't guess what happened at our house last night," she said when her time came. "Vic Kline and Lilly Barbour were married!"

"We hears about it," said Sally Bay, unmoved. "Funny, wa'n't it? Law, yes!" Then she rocked vigorously for a time, but began again confidentially. "Did you hear what happened to Harriette Baker last night?"

Spring came to Paxton that year as mildly as an old memory might well up within us to bless us with its recollections. Dr. Morgenthal, standing out on the front porch, saw a large round-breasted robin fly to a low limb and look inquiringly about. Soon it was joined by another and hardier bird, and the two winged down toward the garden in quest of household goods.

Later the small bluebirds, with their tiny curves and dainty manners, gave bright color to the out-of-doors. The roads about Paxton dried up so that teams might come in clean-footed; people got out and raked up old leaves and burned them, filling the air with a blue and fragrant haze; about the houses bulbs began to shoot up.

Is it true that nomadic man, encamped for the winter through necessity, rejoiced for so many generations at springtime because the coming of this season meant for him freedom and better feeding-grounds, that to-day we have a springtime instinct? A tendency that bids us make glad and shout for joy when warm winds blow from the south and the maple buds turn red?

Maybe this is the explanation, maybe not. But we rejoice in the coming of spring. The human heart swells as the bud swells; the maid and the lover make merry with the birds.

Old Dr. Morgenthal was enormously elated. At the growing signs of spring he prepared some rich soil in three boxes, and in this soil he sowed his seeds. Lettuce he put in one, and tomatoes in another. In the third he put sweet peppers.

"The lettuce will be fine for early sandwiches with

mayonnaise," he explained to Mrs. Morgenthal, referring to a favorite dish of his. "When I get the garden plowed I will transplant these radishes. As for the peppers," he chuckled, "there is nothing like one of them filled full of the things you put in them."

She was delighted at this reference to her stuffed sweet peppers, and promised him an abundance of them as soon as he raised enough to supply the table. Whereupon he made a plan.

"I will sow them first in this box," he said. "Then I will transplant them when they come up, and put them in little cans and keep them inside."

Came the time when doors might be left open without fear of the house's cooling off. Soft breezes blew from warm fields and pregnant woods, and drifted mild and fragrant through the old parsonage. Curtains rustled softly.

On an evening so mild the occupants of the parsonage sat out on the porch, there came down to them from some place up the street the soft and dreamy notes of music.

"Do you hear that?" the old Doctor asked.

"That is Stephen Bay with his dulcimer," Earl informed him.

"Listen!"

From up on the little rise, from a house seen dimly through the swelling buds, came the plaintive melody of the old instrument.

"What is he playing?" Edith asked, listening.

"'Carry Me Back to Old Virginny.'"

"He is old and old," Earl said, as if the others had not seen him. "Ninety-one. And his old fingers are

crooked and he is so humped he can't stand straight. But he can play that dulcimer!"

"I wonder if he came from Virginia."

"He lived down there when he was a little boy."

"They say people who come from there always want to go back."

"He says he could not see his people if he should go back. They are all dead. But he would like to see the old place again."

And one could imagine the thoughts that were his as, bent and old, he looked back to the warm country where he rambled and played as a boy. Perhaps that was why the notes of the old instrument were so plaintive.

The beautiful articulate night, the stars that were no longer cold but nearer and friendly, the odor of warming earth from the yard and from the flower beds, and the plaintive music of the dulcimer up on the hill.

The next day Dr. Morgenthal brought Hope Erksen down from the Office. "I want to show you how I have planned it to have early vegetables," he said.

He showed the three boxes with lettuce in one, tomatoes in the other, and peppers in the third. "I have heard frost does not hurt peas, and I thought for a while of putting out some of them. But they take up too much room."

"I guess you are 'baout as well off, at that. 'N it won't hurt you to do without 'till the rest of us have some."

"I am going to transplant the peppers so as to have stuffed ones early."

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"Do you happen to like t' fish?" Hope Erksen asked, suddenly.

"Come up to the study," the Doctor commanded, as suddenly.

Arriving there he displayed a tobacco can filled with hooks, another containing numerous sinkers of divers sizes, a card of snell hooks and three blue and red bobbers.

"Do I like to fish?"

Hope Erksen slapped his hands on his knees. "Cricky, we can soon get down to Hollaton and try our luck!"

"I thought they wouldn't allow fishing there."

"I think I can fix it," he said, winking.

Earl stuck his head in at the door. "Old Mrs. Todi called and wants you to come down," he said.

"What is wrong?" the Doctor asked in quick sympathy.

"He fell, out by the well."

"You come and go with me," he asked Hope Erksen.

"It ain't best for me to go."

"Not best? Why not?"

"Mebbe you don't know it. But there ain't no one else gits quite so close to people as their preacher. She jest wants you."

And so he went alone down Shady Lane, his tall form slightly bent, for already sympathy for these two was draining him. Mrs. Todi met him at the door, her features a little harder even than before. The smile she gave came from thin lips. But it was a smile.

"Come in this way."

There were many articles hanging about on chairs.

Mrs. Todi now did washing and ironing for people. But a seat was found near the couch.

"That you, Doctor?"

"It is, brother. Are you hurt much?"

"I don't think I am." The voice was the voice of a man who discounts every misfortune because of a tenacious hope in the future. Hearing him, one could understand how all these years he had been hoping for the ship that never came in.

With the blind man on the couch and Mrs. Todi sitting silent and somewhat rebellious near it, Dr. Morgenthal spoke to them. He stopped occasionally to steady his voice or to gain control of his lips. But as a soft hand stops the restless tossing, his words gave a new hope to one, and touched the other with the remarkable thing which is human sympathy.

Mrs. Todi did not accompany him to the door when he went away. His glance back from the door revealed Mr. Todi with the groping, baffled expression of the blind on his face, lying on his couch, while she sat beside him, her features a little hard, but somewhat relaxed.

Walking up the street, with this picture still held in his mind, he recalled another one: two people, a young man and a young woman, planning for a home all paid for, with the three acres added to the place and converted into a thriving truck farm.

It was the plan that Mrs. Todi had made with her husband when they were first married, thirty-seven years ago. But the nail had hit him in the eye.

"I hope I helped them," he sighed.

CHAPTER XXIV

MRS. MORGENTHAL was busy at the stove, while the Doctor stood looking out of the kitchen window. She was purposely busy, to hide her nervousness. His face was anxious.

"I guess we will soon know," he was saying.

"When is it to be?"

"In three weeks, now," he answered, referring to the final Quarterly Conference where the question of his return to the Paxton charge should be decided.

"They seem to like us."

"I believe they do. I believe they will invite us back," he stated, eagerly, looking to her for confirmation. "Don't you?"

"I think so." She sighed.

But he was not certain. The old man of him which had begun to depend upon others for confirmation of opinions—depending upon them because the leash of the newer generation had been felt—would not permit absolute certainty. He only wanted to be certain.

The old town had got hold of him. The quiet of it, the old houses and unhurried people, the atmosphere that breathed a great peace, were to him as a rock in a weary land.

"I believe they will," he repeated, slowly.

He saw Hope Erksen coming down the street. The old man had little to do at home, and this fine weather

he liked to get out and stir about. Since the death of little Phillips the path between the two houses had been as the path of the heart.

When the Doctor saw him coming his anxious face became sly. "I'll just show him how they are growing," he said.

"So they be comin' up, mebbe," Hope Erksen exclaimed on seeing the boxes in which the seed had been sown. "They look purty thrivin'."

"They undoubtedly do," the Doctor said with conviction, running his fingers among them. "They are hardy plants."

"What you goin' to do with 'em?"

"Transplant. But I am going to keep the peppers inside in little cans."

"Ever garden before?"

"Not before. But I have misced something."

"It is a great thing."

Supper over and again out on the porch, the Morgenthals heard the sweet but plaintive music of the old dulcimer. It floated down to them, adding a sad note to the peaceful night.

"Stephen Bay again."

"He is still thinking about those old days."

"'Carry Me Back!' But isn't it beautiful?"

"That reminds me," Dr. Morgenthal said. "I have a book I want to read."

When the others entered the house they found him absorbed in a small volume.

"Have you a new book?" Mrs. Morgenthal asked, not remembering to have dusted one exactly like that.

"A book of poems by that young Dexter," he an-

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swered with genuine pleasure in his voice. "That boy is a genius!"

"You don't mean our John Dexter?" Mrs. Morgenthal asked, incredulously.

"I do mean him. He handed me this and asked me to read it. I did not know it was written by him until I came in here. There are some good things in it too."

Edith took the book from him with fingers that were cold. She opened it and stood staring at the pages absently, leafing through them without knowing she was doing so. She looked for the name of the author. There was no mistaking it. Her eyes caught a familiar line: It was one from the page she had tucked in her breast.

Her heart became heavy within her. He had not given the book to her, but to her father. He had not forgiven her, then. He could not forget. She did not measure up to his first high opinion of her.

She wanted him then. She wanted to tell him how sorry she was that she had not been true to the part of her that saw all this within him even before the book was published.

The book! She gave it back to her father with a little quick gesture of despair and sought her own room. She lay on the bed face down. She could not go to him now. She could not tell him she believed in him now. So would everybody else do. The whole town would soon be pointing him out as if to say, "Yes, he is the man. He lives here!" She had lost her chance to be first; she could not be last.

She did not cry. She was too weary to cry. All the months of struggle seemed now to have issued in

this, and this was intolerable. He had not given her the book!

It was so the next day and the next. She read the book from cover to cover, and its words were the voice of her own soul. But she could not tell him that. Nor did he seek her out.

Even when all were laughing at the great joke Hope Erksen told on her father, she did not care to join in. The affair struck her as bizarre.

The seeds had swelled and the young peppers had come up. The old Doctor tended them carefully day by day and saw with delight that they grew with healthy vigor.

The peppers were soon big enough to transplant in the small cans. He did not transplant them all; there was not room for that. So he took delight in observing that the ones he had transplanted grew much faster than the others.

They took a lot of his time, but he did not care for that. Paxton seemed to consider that time spent in human enjoyment was well spent. His pride grew as his peppers grew. When they had grown up until they seemed particularly robust he brought his friend down to see them.

Hope Erksen approached them soberly and looked them over very slowly. He touched them with inquisitive finger. Then he glanced curiously at the old Doctor.

"Where are the peppers?" he asked.

"Those!" the Doctor said, indicating the plants he had been poking with his fingers. "In those cans there."

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Hope Erksen looked at them again, this time even more deliberately. Again he looked at the Doctor, his face working in what was suspiciously near a smile.

"These be saour docks," he said, finally.

"Sour docks! But those are my peppers!"

"Saour docks," he repeated.

Then he bent over and clapped his hands to his knees. He straightened up with a great shout. "Oh-ho-ho!" he laughed, "You have dug up your peppers and transplanted the docks."

It was even as he said. Dr. Morgenthal had destroyed his peppers and with great care transplanted docks. They were now shooting up in soft but hardy folds.

"Didn't you know any better?" Hope Erksen asked, wiping his eyes.

"N-no, I didn't," was the reply, and it came from a very crestfallen man.

"Naow, mebbe you will wait until the rest of us have some too, 'ithout tryin' to git 'em all first."

But in the days that followed Edith was not the only one who was dejected. Dr. Morgenthal became increasingly concerned as the day drew near for the final Quarterly Conference.

His return meant much to him. After the manner of his kind, he had forgotten himself during the years of his ministry and had given his goods to the poor. Never was cry of distress but he answered it. The result was that even the little income from his present parish was essential.

Also to him who had devoted his life to trying to do good, it meant much that he have an opportunity

to continue his efforts. And there was this further to be said: Dr. Morgenthal was a human being, and he had the desire of every man to stand on a pedestal before his wife. For the pride of that one woman in him he cared more than for the whole world.

He recalled the old days when he had been the much-sought at Conferences: It had been her pride in him that made him glad. He remembered that when his marvelous physique had enabled him to accomplish wonders in his parish she had regarded him with eyes that glowed.

Of course he did not know that his appeal to her in his weakness was greater than ever it was in his strength. He did not know that she watched over him now with a fierce protective love that knew no bounds to sacrifice—for which, indeed, there was no sacrifice. With masculine inability to understand even the woman he loved, he thought her continued regard for him required a constant show of his prowess, if not in one direction, then in another.

And that was why his shoulders sagged during those final days. That was why his eyes, when he was alone in his study, often held the look of the hunted animal which realizes at last that escape has been cut off.

"I believe they will ask for me back," he said to her one day, more to have her express the same opinion than to give his own conviction.

And reading his thoughts she hesitated. If she should say she thought the same, it might lift his hopes too high; while if she said so and he were not returned, in his moments of remembering—and there would be plenty of time to recall all these things if he were not

returned!—he might think she had been disappointed in him. Not very likely, of course. But memory often plays queer tricks.

"I am sure of it," she finally said, defiantly. "I am sure of it."

His face lighted up at these words, although if he had stopped to think he would have known she did not have the opportunities he had for forming accurate judgment as to the condition of the parish.

But no words could allay his nervousness on the morning of the final Conference. He prepared his report with elaborate care, listing all his activities and arranging the items to make the best showing.

She went with him. He walked beside her without a word, and she herself made no attempt at conversation. The district superintendent greeted him heartily at the church; the members of the Official Board took their places, and the Conference came to order.

Mrs. Morgenthal never could recall the transactions of that Conference. It was a garble of incoherency to her until her husband got up to make his report. She heard him through, saw him sit down, heard the stereotyped words of the superintendent.

"Is there any further business to come before us?" he asked. It was this question that made Mrs. Morgenthal's heart stop beating.

She thought the silence lasted an hour. She was stifled. She could not get her breath. No one seemed to want to say a word.

Then Hope Erksen got up. His eyes twinkled merrily, as they did when a task he was performing was exactly to his liking. His little moustache stood

out in clownish merriment. She might have seen the fun in his face, but she did not.

"Brothers," he began, cheerfully, "I have been put daown fer a speech, 'n I'm goin' to make it. Up here we believe that the church is a religious organization 'n needs religion 'n not so much hubbub. We'd ruther have a man as knowed haow to help us when we needed it than to be able to put zip-bang into a church."

This expression evidently tickled old Guiraud, for he smiled cheerfully, drumming on his knees with his pudgy fingers.

"We've had both kinds of preachers," Hope Erksen continued, "'n we've got the right kind naow. We've never had such a man since I been here. 'Course that ain't been long, but it's some. We want him back, 'n we're goin' to have him, ain't we?"

"Amen!" was the chorus that greeted this question.

"'N naow fer the conclusion of my speech," as he stooped and picked up a small package from the pew in front of him. "This is the conclusion," he continued, unwrapping the package. He held up a gold watch and chain that glowed dully in the soft light. "We're goin' to present this to our preacher, 'n may he have many, many years here with us to look at it in!"

The affair had evidently been planned beforehand, for when Hope Erksen sat down the organ started up, and the people arose to sing "Blest be the tie that binds."

Mrs. Morgenthal looked at her husband. He had turned partly and sat with his head bowed on the back of his pew. She put handkerchief to her eyes,

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then gave up trying to keep back the tears and joined happily in the song.

When the Conference was declared adjourned, Hope Erksen went over and got Dr. Morgenthal by the hand. "Cricky, we got you," he said.

"Yes, you have me," the Doctor replied. But he was thinking how his own heart was bound to these people.

They had him!

CHAPTER XXV

NOW comes narration of an event which has never been fully understood, even by the people of Paxton. They will advance explanations of a sort; will try to prove this and that. But the fact is, no one definitely knows.

The event was really monstrous, whatever the explanation. It is difficult to think that human beings could have undertaken it. Of course, the ultimate effect on the story of Edith Morgenthal might seem happy indeed. But the thing that led to this effect was monstrous.

If you have ever been in Paxton, you know by this time the event to which reference is made, for Paxton people speak of it in the strongest terms. It was the effort that was made to kill off the sugar trees.

Old man Hartman, who lived down South Street, went out through his bush one morning. It was weeks after sugaring time. He found hundreds of his trees killed. With some sharp instrument a little ring had been chopped clear around the trees, thus killing them irreparably.

At first he could hardly believe his eyes. He went up to a tree, a splendid maple that for years had been flourishing and now grew tall and smooth, and put his hand to the gash. Touch confirmed sight.

The tree had been circled by the axe or hatchet, the gash going through the bark completely. It was killed. There were others like it, hundreds of them.

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Some people incline to the opinion that sectional jealousy led to the outrage. They think one county, becoming jealous of the other's output, had sent in a gang to destroy the trees.

There are others who lay the blame to the beet sugar manufacturers, who disliked competition of the maple sugar makers of the north, and thought to end it by the simple expedient of killing off all the maples.

But most people hold another opinion. They think the lumbermen wanted the timber of those fine big maples and, not being able to buy it so long as the farmers kept them for the sugar, sent their vandals down to kill the trees so the farmers would sell.

But be the explanation what it may, the fact stands that old man Hartman found his trees ringed and killed. Of course the news spread quickly. One after another heard it, and each passed it on.

Feeling ran high. Paxton was proud of the sugar bush. Little knots of men collected here and there to discuss the outrage. Possible motives were discussed; the probable identity of the vandals was speculated upon.

That was the tinder. The match was touched to it the next day when old man Hartman drove into town and said two hundred more trees had been killed that night.

I have often tried to imagine how this news fell upon the ears of those old independent dolichocephalic men. They were quiet and undemonstrative when at peace; they undoubtedly could be ice cold and wolf merciless when stirred up.

So long had they lived up there on their own farms

and attended to their own business that each man felt within him the germ of sovereignty that brooked absolutely no interference.

But here was a destroyer aiming at their pride. The little knots of men that yesterday gathered to discuss the affair to-day went home and got ready. No one knew where to expect the next blow. But no one was going to take chances.

Earl had been spending the day with Knowles Carleton. The pleasure of Kit the thoroughbred had been his by invitation, and he was not slow in enjoying it.

Carleton came to him to explain.

"We are going to guard the bush to-night," he ended. "You can stay here at the house, or go home, or go with us, just as you wish."

Mrs. Morgenthal had always been sorry Earl had blue eyes. She said there was no expression in them. But could she have seen them as Carleton spoke, she would have changed her mind. They sparkled with a great delight.

"Go?" he shouted. "I'll go with you!"

"I am glad you will, old boy," Knowles answered, man to man.

The Carleton sugar bush was south of the house, containing some eight hundred trees. It was only a mile and a half from old man Hartman's, and because it was in the same neighborhood there was a general apprehension.

About dark eight men gathered at the Carleton barn. They were big men, roughly dressed: Red rubber boots with blue or brown overalls stuffed in the tops, heavy blue shirts and slouch hats.

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Knowles Carleton went out to the barn, stripped for action and looking gigantic. He carried a heavy oak mattock handle. He smiled as he approached the men, as though the prospect did not altogether displease him.

"The way I figure it," he explained, "is that they turn a dozen or so men loose in the bush armed with hatchets. They go from tree to tree ringing them. They could do a lot in one night."

"They did to old man Hartman," some one muttered.

"And they may to us. My idea is that we divide. They will split up themselves, so as to get more done. If we could make four groups, that would be one for each side."

Not much talking was done. Quietly the men formed the four groups. Earl went with Carleton, and with them Frank James. James was only a boy of nineteen, but he was a big, loose-jointed fellow with an eye that never wavered.

"I kinda hope we run into them," he said, quietly.

"You may get all you want."

"I should worry," as he slouched along.

They took their station at the north of the bush. They sat down without a word. James sprawled loosely out on the ground; Carleton stroked the mattock handle. Earl was hoping.

They had been there for a long time. Frank James slept. Earl was getting enormously drowsy. He sat there by the tree and tried to find five stars that would form the inverted V after the fashion of marbles placed ready for a game.

It got chilly. The ground got cold. . . . If they could only have a little fire. . . . He smiled sleepily at the thought of a fire. . . . He wanted to get in bed . . . and cover up.

Carleton moved beside him, a cautious movement that roused him to instant wakefulness. Over James's mouth Carleton placed his hand while he woke him.

"Do you hear that?" Carleton whispered.

They strained their ears, listening. From somewhere, they could not tell whether far or near, came the muffled sound as of hacking: the sound men might make ringing trees with hatchets.

"I hear 'em, by gosh," James said, straightening up.

"Easy now," Carleton cautioned. "Let's wait a minute."

"They kill one of your trees about every minute we wait."

This stirred Carleton. "Come on then. We will go to them. But we must go easy."

Clutching the mattock handle in his hand, he started worming his way forward, the others following him.

They got near the sound. They were not mistaken. Men were killing the trees. A shadowy figure loomed toward them, and began to hack with skilled precision at a tree not eight feet away.

Carleton transferred the mattock handle to his left hand, took a swift step forward, and swung. The shadow lifted clear of the ground, stiffened, and fell backward.

"What's the matter, Ed?" a muffled voice called guardedly at sound of the heavy thud.

When there was no answer, he called again, more

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insistently. The men were worming closer to him. His voice lifted the third time, now almost fretful.

"Cut it, Ed! All right?"

But just then the long loose form of Frank James lurched forward and twined itself about the man with the complete and strangling hold of a boa.

"You're all right—or will be," he said.

There was a quick movement that drew a hatchet high. The man was going to commit murder. "You won't do it!" he snarled.

Earl saw the hatchet lifted, saw it poised for an instant before descending. He did not reason: he simply jumped up like a dog, his only impulse being to get the hand that held the hatchet. And just as he grasped it, the man fell backward.

"This is easy pickin'," panted James with the nonchalance of a veteran fighter. "Got his windpipe in my hand yet."

But it was not to be such easy picking. A flashlight cut a wide circle in the night, revealing James and Earl by the prostrate man with Knowles whirling quickly, blinded by the light.

As quickly as it flashed the light went out, leaving black darkness. Earl struck a match. It sputtered feebly, but was sufficient. He thrilled at his own unconcern.

"There they are!" Knowles cried, springing.

Ensued a wild scuffle. Great ghost figures danced like satyrs in the night. Sound of heavy breathing, of straining bodies, of quick desperate snarls of fury.

A hatchet zig-zagged tomahawk fashion and gashed into a tree a scant four inches from Carleton's temple.

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Followed a berserk whine, a tremendous impact, and the wielder of the hatchet went down.

"I've got this old boy," Frank James said from another direction. "Got his windpipe in my hand. That's two."

It might have lasted ten minutes or it might have been an hour. The sounds reached other ears and reenforcements reached the scene in time to complete the shambles.

Only once did Earl cry out. With a sang-froid that pleased him as much as it surprised him, he had fought as man with man, asking no allowances and giving none.

But he cried out once. It was along near the end. Carleton, who that night had been transformed in Earl's eyes from a rather nice human being into a god, went down. Forgetful of everything, Earl rushed up to him.

"Are you hurt, old boy?" he asked, thrilled that he had won right to speak as man to man.

There was no answer. When the group of men made their way back to the Carleton home in the gray morning, Knowles was being carried on an improvised stretcher.

Earl reached the old parsonage just after the morning devotionals. He sauntered in with usual indolent indifference, ignoring a swollen lip and a deep cut on his forehead. But Mrs. Morgenthal rushed at him.

"Earl! What is it?" she cried.

"Been out helping capture the fellows that's been killing the sugar trees," he answered, nonchalantly.

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"Tell us what you have been doing!" she cried again.

"We got seven of them. I guess they will live."

He had intended, planning this moment on the way home, to be very taciturn, keeping all information to himself save as it was wormed from him bit by bit, after the maddening way of fourteen.

But the demands of this course were too exacting. He noted the suspense of his father's face, the anxiety of his mother's, the indifference of Edith. It was this latter that angered him.

"Yes, sir, we got them!" he burst out, throwing all reserve to the winds. "Old Knowles said they might get at his bush last night, and asked me to help him guard it," he declaimed in his high uncertain voice. "There was a lot of us gathered out at the barn and went out in four groups, one for each side of the bush. Me and Knowles and Frank James made one group. We set out there in the woods until we thought they must have gone somewhere else, and then we heard the whack-whack-whack of the hatchets! Old Knowles had a mattock handle that he could a caved an elephant's head in with, and he started toward the sound. The first man we struck was ringing a tree right by Knowles. But did he use his club? He did—nit! He just doubled up his old fist and shot it out like a sledge hammer, and the old dog keeled over."

By this time Earl was in the center of the room. Nor was he standing still. His eyes snapping and sparkling, he hopped about from place to place, speaking in a voice that was quavering and uncertain, acting out the whole struggle. As he finished he reeled backward, showing how the old dog fell.

"Frank James is no slouch, either," he continued, admiringly. "When he fights he just wraps around you and strangles you to death, like one of them big snakes. He got two of them, too, winding about them and wrapping his fingers in their windpipes.

"But say! Can old Carley fight? O no! That boy can't fight. Hi!" his voice broke into a little cackle. "They flashed a light on us and blinded us. But I lit a match so old Carley could see."

"You!"

"Sure. Didn't I say I was helping? And old Knowles saw them. 'There they are!' he yelled and made at them. He just drove through them striking with both fists. I saw him put his foot on a man he had just knocked down and jerk across at another!

"Then a man slipped up from the other side. He swung his hatchet that he had been killing the trees with and it stuck in a tree by Knowles's head.

"But did that scare old Carley? Hi!" he cackled again, jumping up and down and waving his arms. "He just took one look and saw the man. Then he got the old mattock handle and waved it over his head a few times and let 'er fly.

"It went through the air—phit-phit, phit-phit, phit-phit, turning end on end, and then—pow! it hit a tree and bounced off and struck that old guy on the chin.

"Can old Carley fight! Say!"

"Did he get hurt?" It was Edith's voice.

"Yeah, they finally got him," Earl said, disappointedly. "An old gink hit him on the head with an ax."

Edith's fingers closed over his arm like a vise. He

wincing, only to gape at the expression on her face. "Did it hurt him?" she demanded.

His eyes wavered. He had not looked for any such result as this. His triumph in some inexplicable way was changing into something else—something very different.

"They carried him home," he said, impatiently.

"Was he—was he killed?"

"O, cut it!" he cried, angered that she should spit out her words at him thus. "I didn't do it."

"Tell m-me. Was he hurt?"

"Sure he was hurt. Didn't I say so?"

She released his arm and turned a white face to her mother. "I must go at once," she said.

"But, Edith! Think!"

"I must go," she repeated.

"Daughter," Dr. Morgenthal began, inquiringly, "what does this mean?"

"O, can't you see? Help me. I must go."

She thought they would never get there. Each step seemed a mile. When they turned into the lane and she saw the house she wanted to get out and run.

Margaret opened the door for her.

"Where is he? Will he live?"

"He is better now. In there."

She saw him lying on the davenport, his head and neck bandaged thickly. He was very pale, for he had lost much blood. His eyes were closed.

She flew to his side and dropped to her knees. In wild terror she looked at him, then saw that he was breathing. She flung one arm up on his breast and dropped her head upon it.

He opened his eyes and saw the dark head on his breast. For a moment, just awakened from a sleep of exhaustion, he could not comprehend. He lifted a hand and touched a strand of the silken plait.

She lifted her head quickly, and her deep eyes looked through tears into his own.

"O, Knowles, Knowles," she sobbed, her head again dropping on his breast.

Then quite unexpectedly, she lifted it and kissed him.

"Am I dead and in heaven, or is it you?" he asked with a return of the old banter.

"You silly boy!" She smiled at him, her face lighted up as only the face of a woman can light up when it is glorified by love.

"I guess I am in heaven all right, dead or alive."

"You must not move!"

"Then you——"

She kissed him again.

CHAPTER XXVI.

JOHAN DEXTER heard all, as it was inevitable that he should. Edith looked from the window on an afternoon a few days later, and saw him coming up the walk.

She stifled an impulse to slip away and not see him. She would see him now and have it all over with. But her own mind was in a turmoil. Had she in those days when she did not know her own heart, given him occasion to expect what now she knew was impossible?

Quickly her memory ran back, recalling scene after scene with sharp vividness. Only now she recalled not alone the literal reproductions, but what her own mind, at the time and since, had read into each.

She could not keep her fingers from shaking as she extended her hand to him, but she hoped he did not notice. Really, he did seem bent on making it easy for her, so quietly and naturally did he greet her.

"And now," he said after their first greetings were over, "I have heard, and I want to take the liberty of a friend and congratulate you."

She did not even pretend to misunderstand him. She knew the time for evasion was past. So she smiled bravely, although she did not meet his eyes.

"Thank you," she said.

"But I have more than that to speak to you about," he continued with a little apologetic gesture. "May we sit down?"

"O, certainly," she stammered, hastening to offer him a seat and herself sitting down also.

"I want to speak to you about—you and me," he said, slowly as he leaned slightly back. "Much of what I shall say, you know. Some of it you do not. Shall I begin at the beginning?"

She nodded her head, her heart fluttering in her breast.

"You know what I was when you came, and what you did for me—bringing my better self to the top."

She made a gesture to disclaim any credit, now hoping her part in molding his past had not been so considerable after all. But he checked her.

"Please. Let me speak out. I saw you were ashamed of that old self of mine, and I put on the other. I was so grateful to you I did not know how to express it. I honestly believe," he continued, earnestly, "I was just like the dog that would lick your hand to show his gratitude. But I saw another thing. I saw that you thought I was inferior to other men, even to yourself. Don't!" he checked her again. "You know I said once that this new self of mine enabled me to understand people. I seem able to see within them to their thoughts. And I saw this in you. I understand perfectly. I knew just how it was, how it came about. But I did not like it so. I decided to do something to stop it. I made you think I was angry. I acted as though I did not care for your opinion at all. I gave the book to your father. You understand, don't you? If I could be angry, I considered myself superior. You see? Anger is always toward the inferior. But I know you do see. I knew you did at the time.

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You changed toward me after that. I had won your respect. And that was worth a world to me."

He ceased speaking. She did not know what answer to make. So far, his words might simply be a prelude to something else, to something deeper; or they might be a declaration that explained or settled everything. Which had he meant them to be?

"Hello," he said, looking out, "there they come. I told them I would come over and get you."

Knowles and Margaret were in the car outside. Knowles sat at the wheel, a little weak yet, but sufficiently recovered to be about. Margaret was standing up in the car, looking toward the house.

"What is it?" Edith turned to Dexter.

"We are going for a drive," he told her. "Get into your things."

Margaret floated down to meet her, her eyes roguish with a scintillating happiness. "See!" she said, holding out her hand.

On the third finger a small solitaire diamond hung like a drop of dew against the background of her slim finger.

"What is it?" Edith gasped.

"It is my engagement ring," Margaret answered in mock severity. "What does it usually mean, I'd like to know!"

Dexter closed his hand over the ring, the fingers and the whole small hand as well. "It is our ring," he said, still holding the hand.

"Silly! You gave it to me!" Margaret rippled, freeing her hand.

"I——" Dexter began, but Carleton interrupted.

"Come on, Edith. You are *persona non grata* there."

Knowles Carleton was a man who always wanted his own way, even as Lila Matthews had said. And he held out stubbornly for an early date. He had his way.

The wedding was set for eight o'clock. There had been no elaborate preparations, for it was to be a simple affair in the living room of the old parsonage. The old house that held so many memories was to have another.

The first guests to arrive were Sally Bay and her Fred and Hallie. Sally Bay came dressed in all her finery, her sharp eyes turning this way, that, and missing nothing.

Hope Erksen came next, with Mrs. Erksen on his arm in the stately way she had. Uncle Hi arrived at last, and old Guiraud also. The guests were to be few, but those that should be present would, in very truth, be friends.

The piano that the Ladies' Aid furnished for the parsonage because a piano was too heavy for a minister to move around, responded to Hallie Bay's touch, and the wedding march began.

Dr. Morgenthal came first, his tall form held erect in a kind of military precision, the ritual in his hand. And following him were Edith and Knowles, the latter in conventional black and she in her simple white dress of embroidered voile.

Knowles looked down at her as they stopped, and his eyes said to her that she was the most beautiful

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woman the sun ever shone upon. And she, reading his thoughts, blushed an even rosier pink.

Dexter stepped to Carleton's side and Margaret to Edith's, for they were bridesmaid and best man. Then in a voice filled with a great tenderness because he was giving up his last daughter, and with a great pride because he knew she was worthy of any man, old Dr. Morgenthal married them.

Once as he paused in the ceremony for the ring, the breeze fluttered through the curtains and carried down from the house on the hill, the mellow old plaintive notes of the dulcimer. Stephen Bay was up there, thinking.

Two pictures linger in my memory as I come to the end of this chronicle. One is of Knowles and Edith at the conclusion of the ceremony. He was just turning to face the guests when he stopped for an instant to look at Edith standing there beside him. I wish you might have seen the high exultation that was his and the radiant loveliness of her.

The other is of Hope Erksen and Dr. Morgenthal. The Doctor was coming back from the Annual Conference, and Hope Erksen had slipped down to the car to meet him.

"Cricky," he chuckled as he blinked back the tears, "we got you back!"

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